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Speaking gospel language about Israel-Palestine

Dena Nicolai

This is the final instalment in a three part series on Israel-Palestine. The earlier instalments ran in the June 25 and July 23 issues of CC.

Every year, millions of tourists visit the Holy Land, a large number of them Christians. The experience is, for many, a profoundly spiritual one – to walk where Jesus walked, to visit the sites of the Bible, to be physically present in a land so connected with our faith. But amidst the historical and religious sites, the present day realities of Israel-Palestine require us to ask difficult questions about our responsibility as Christians.

Former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah wrote in his fourth pastoral letter, *Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible*, “To read and to live the Bible today in the land of the Bible is a grace and a challenge. A grace, because we journey daily with the same Jesus along the same roads, where he walked with his disciples, as companion and friend. A challenge, because what we experience today in this same land of conflict and sufferings enters our own conversation with the same Lord, in order to make our own ‘hearts burn within us’ as he talks to us on our own pilgrim journey, ‘opens up the Scriptures to us’ (Luke 24:32), and helps us to discern the will of the Father in the unfolding of our history.”

What does this challenge mean for we who follow Christ in the West today?

Responsible tourism

As one Greek Orthodox priest living in Jerusalem put it, “As

Christians, we’re called to bear the cross. We don’t get to take a day off.” This means that even as visitors, we cannot ignore the present situation of conflict. Rev. David Neuhaus, vicar of the Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel and a child of Holocaust survivors, is emphatic: “These are not just far away people squabbling.... The Western Church is directly implicated in what’s going on here, and this is not a conflict just like any other. It is intricately tied with the actions of the church [through colonialism, one-sided support and other involvement].”

Neuhaus continues, “We must think: How do we read the Bible and what does the crucifixion and resurrection mean for us today? And we must hold together two problems: a Christian history of a theology of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, and people who have been abused by the misuse of anti-Semitism,” referring to the debate over whether or not the

label of “anti-Semitic” is too indiscriminately applied to any criticism of the modern state of Israel.

Furthermore, Neuhaus points out that there are two distinct problems with any theology that advocates the modern state of Israel as a furthering of the return of the Messiah: “It is eschatological manipulation of the Jewish people, which is vulgar and violent, and it ignores the plight of Palestinians.” He is insistent that even those visiting only a short time in Israel-Palestine leave with a charge: “When people come [to the Holy Land], I tell them: ‘You have a direct personal responsibility in regard to how you speak.’ Words create reality – the world is created by words, and we



Many Christian tourists visit the Holy Land each year.

have control over that. We must use our evangelical [in the broad sense of the word] imagination regarding how the world should be, and that should define how we speak. We’ve destroyed the world with our words but we are witnesses to a ‘Christ discourse.’ We must speak as Jesus would speak, no matter what side we’re on. This we can do! When we go out of this land we must never

speak about any people the same again. And we must counter [wrong language] wherever we meet it.”

Building bridges

For Western Christians, this new language might involve how we speak of Islam in regards to the Holy Land. Anglican priest and scholar Colin Chapman writes that

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Canada’s frail infrastructure



A piece of the Concorde overpass in Laval, Que. came down and crushed five motorists in 2006.

Mike Wevers

Some believe politicians act best when they respond to what their citizens want. And generally speaking, we want more – more and better hospitals, roadways and recreational facilities. Too often, then, our politicians cannot resist the urge to “ribbon cut” in response, on their way to re-election, ignoring the need

to rehabilitate existing public assets. Always looking for photo-ops, particularly in run-ups to elections, there is nothing better than opening a new hospital, school or roadway. Sometimes we pay a harsh price for these misguided priorities.

Crumbling assets

In 2006, a piece of the Concorde overpass in Laval, Que. came down and crushed five motorists. In a subsequent Quebec provincial government review, it was found that 57 of 135 bridges inspected needed action, including removing

and replacing 28 of them. While original engineering lapses were identified as part of the Concorde overpass problem, inspection work was not being undertaken to identify problems and perform fixes in a timely fashion. The collapse of the Minnesota bridge over the Mississippi River in 2007, which killed 16, was also partially attributed to faulty design and construction as the bridge’s metal plates were deemed inadequate to carry its load. But it was 40 years old, and undergoing repairs at the time of

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News

Gospel language *continued*

though it's understandable that many Christians see Islam as a threat in both political and spiritual terms, "it can be very dangerous for us to allow all our fears and prejudices about Muslims which have developed in other western contexts ... to colour and distort our understanding of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians." Salim Munayer, the Palestinian Christian founder of Musalaha – an organization that brings Jewish and Arab believers together – reminds us, "As Christians, we say that we are all, including Muslims, made in the image of God – it's a fundamental truth about all of us: there's something in us that's of God.... We must consider what [our] commonalities are that would allow us to live together and build bridges."

The wrong done by some Muslims in the conflict or the violence perpetrated by groups like Hamas does not negate our Christian responsibility. Instead of looking solely at those Muslims who are using violence, many in the Holy Land encourage us to give a larger voice to Muslim peacemakers such as Haidar Abdel Shafi, journalist Ali Abunimah, Fatima Khaldi or Izzeldin Abuelaish, a doctor from Gaza who lost three daughters and a niece to Israeli tank shells in 2009 and in the aftermath has devoted his life to working for peace (his story is detailed in his book, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity*).

Breaking the dividing wall

Believers in the Holy Land are unequivocal about the need for greater unity in the church as a model and support to believers in Israel-Palestine. There is a large ecumenical divide between those churches that are "pro-Israel" and those churches that are "pro-Palestinian." But as David Neuhaus again explains, "we must move beyond that: the church is called to be prophetic, not to speak a particular ideology. We must speak the gospel language. We must proclaim Ephesians 2."

Palestinian Melkite Archbishop Elias Chacour urges us not to be a friend to the Palestinians if it means being an enemy to the Israelis, or vice versa: "We need one more common friend," he says. "We do not need friendship [if it means becoming one-sided against] my Jewish brothers and

The Christ at the Checkpoint Conference was held at Bethlehem Bible College on March 5-9, 2012. The following manifesto was presented to participants on the last day, but was only agreed upon by the conference organizers. For more information see www.christatthecheckpoint.com.

The Christ at the Checkpoint Manifesto

1. The Kingdom of God has come. Evangelicals must reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel.
2. Reconciliation recognizes God's image in one another.
3. Racial ethnicity alone does not guarantee the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant.
4. The Church in the land of the Holy One, has born witness to Christ since the days of Pentecost. It must be empowered to continue to be light and salt in the region, if there is to be hope in the midst of conflict.
5. Any exclusive claim to land of the Bible in the name of God is not in line with the teaching of Scripture.
6. All forms of violence must be refuted unequivocally.
7. Palestinian Christians must not lose the capacity to self-criticism if they wish to remain prophetic.
8. There are real injustices taking place in the Palestinian territories and the suffering of the Palestinian

people can no longer be ignored. Any solution must respect the equity and rights of Israel and Palestinian communities.

9. For Palestinian Christians, the occupation is the core issue of the conflict.
10. Any challenge of the injustices taking place in the Holy Land must be done in Christian love. Criticism of Israel and the occupation cannot be confused with anti-Semitism and the delegitimization of the State of Israel.
11. Respectful dialogue between Palestinian and Messianic believers must continue. Though we may disagree on secondary matters of theology, the Gospel of Jesus and his ethical teaching take precedence.
12. Christians must understand the global context for the rise of extremist Islam. We challenge stereotyping of all faith forms that betray God's commandment to love our neighbors and enemies.

sisters.... We do not need one more enemy, for God's sake."

Blessed are the peacemakers

As Christians called to solidarity with all who are standing for peace; regardless of their religion, we cannot stand aside and leave the peace process to governments. "Politics is the art of living together," says Salim Munayer. "Therefore the Bible is political. We must change the structures of injustice. There must be action on both sides and we must acknowledge the wounds of both. We must learn both about Deir Yassin [the 1948 massacre of Palestinian villagers by Jewish paramilitary groups] and Yad Vashem [Israel's Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem]."

This solidarity means standing with the thousands of Jewish Israelis working for peace, people involved with Israeli organizations such as B'Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights, Breaking the Silence, Creativity for Peace, Parents Circle, Coalition of Women for Peace, and Machsom Watch. It also

means standing with the numerous Palestinians – both Muslim and Christian – who are striving for peaceful and just resolution. When we speak together as peacemakers, Elias Chacour reminds us that then, "We shall no longer shout 'Peace, peace!' and see nothing but war, war that goes on getting ever more horrifying. We shall stop trying to establish our security, which at the end of the day is nothing but domination and segregation masquerading as peace. We shall begin to do justly, to have moral integrity. We shall become peacemakers, makers of [God's] Peace. And then we shall know its fruits: peace and love for all in this world, all who are in the Promised Land."

Dena Nicolai is a student in the Master of Christian Studies Program at Regent College in Vancouver. She has travelled to Israel-Palestine several times and spent a month there this summer funded by the "Conway Holy Land Travel Bursary," researching organizations and people involved in peace-building and reconciliation.

Infrastructure *continued*

the collapse. More disconcerting is that the Minnesota bridge was designed and built as a "fracture critical" bridge; that is, to save construction costs no redundancy factors were incorporated into the original bridge design, meaning that the failure of any one member would lead to total collapse.

Poor workmanship and a failure to undertake necessary ongoing maintenance and repair work is not just a public sector problem. We were reminded of that with the recent mall roof collapse in Elliot Lake, Ont., where two shoppers were killed and over 20 injured. An official inquiry has been launched to investigate the circumstances of the mall's roof collapse, but what will not be investigated is how widespread design, construction and inadequate maintenance problems are in private assets. Owners are expected to deal with these issues as part of good business practice.

Danger signs

The seminal document that brought the public infrastructure deficit issue to the forefront of government spending debates in Canada was *Danger Ahead: the Coming Collapse of Canada's Municipal Infrastructure*. Saeed Mirza, then Professor of Civil Engineering at McGill University, undertook this study in 2007 on behalf of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). He argued that because of growing municipal responsibilities without the commensurate revenue growth, municipalities had not been doing the necessary maintenance to infrastructure built in the 1950s and '60s (so they "deferred" maintenance). Mirza's study significantly increased the deferred maintenance estimate from previous projections. Based on surveys of

municipalities representing half of Canada's population, the study doubled the size of a 2003 estimate of some \$60 billion, suggesting that the deferred maintenance number had grown to \$123 billion across Canada for municipal infrastructure – your local roads, freeways, water and sewer systems, social housing and municipal buildings. The study stated that previous estimates had not sufficiently taken into account the infrastructure's age (nearly 60 percent over 40 years old, with nearly half of that over 80 years). As infrastructure moves closer to the end of its useful life, it costs much more to bring up to current standards; just think of the changes in building codes over the recent decades.

Provincial implications

While municipal infrastructure represents an increasing part of Canada's public assets, much of our federal and provincial infrastructure has also deteriorated significantly, as maintenance spending has not kept pace. I had the opportunity to play a role in developing Alberta's 20 Year Capital Plan, which was released in January 2008. The report challenged Alberta to meet the demands for new capital for a rapidly growing population, while also addressing the deferred maintenance issue. Of course, Alberta's fiscal position enabled it to deal with a significant amount of that demand. At over \$6 billion in annual capital spending, Alberta invested nearly three times the national average of all other provinces. Indeed in absolute dollar value, Alberta invests more in capital in many years than does Ontario, even though Ontario has over three times the population. Notwithstanding its enviable fiscal position, Alberta's infra-

structure deficit was estimated to be over \$7 billion. Alberta instituted an Infrastructure Maintenance Program (IMP) to deal with the most critical projects on a priority basis, but it will take many years to reduce the backlog. To accelerate the process when possible, the province will also allocate a portion of any unanticipated surplus to the IMP. However, even Alberta is currently operating in a deficit position (although previous years' surpluses in the Sustainability Fund mean no new debt is incurred and that Alberta is still operating debt free). In his October 2010 report, the Alberta Auditor General expressed concern that the province still has no significant timeline for reducing the deferred maintenance and is still not publicly reporting progress.

Federal government action

If a wealthy province like Alberta has difficulty meeting the infrastructure deficit problem, then what can other provinces do? The federal government has tried to assist through its Building Canada Plan, providing \$33 billion from 2007 to 2014. While this may seem like a huge amount of money, it has to be spread all across Canada and was not all new funding because it continued a transfer of the federal Gas Tax to municipalities. To put the \$33 billion over seven years in some context, Alberta's three year capital plan at that time was some \$20 billion over three years and by extension \$50 billion over 7 years. Since Alberta's share of federal funding is usually around 10 percent (based on population), this means Ottawa was contributing about \$3 billion over the same period of time, or about six percent of Alberta's total

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Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



The absence of pain



It is said that in heaven our Lord will wipe every tear from our eye, and pain will be no more (Rev. 21:4). This pain-free future, clearly not evident on this side of the grave, is held up as one much to be desired. Certainly, in many situations and for many people, pain is a chronic cross they bear, and medical science is working hard to reduce this burden. Surprisingly, there are individuals who already experience no pain. When we look at their lives, it soon becomes clear that this is not a blessing, but a disaster and curse.

People unable to feel pain are said to experience congenital insensitivity to pain. These individuals are rare. In pure cases, they have normal intelligence and can feel other sensory modalities; they feel hard and soft items and differentiate hot and cold, but simply do not experience pain. These individuals often have injuries to their lips and mouth; for instance, when they bite their tongue, they do not sense the pain that alerts most people to stop biting immediately.



People without the pain reflex wouldn't immediately pull their hand away after touching a hot stove.

They suffer from bruises, cuts and burns, as without pain reflex they do not recognize when they are damaging their body. Pain obviously serves a very important

function: letting us know early that we are in a situation in which damage to our body may occur. Without the pain reflex we do not immediately pull our hand away from a hot stove; rather, we have to consciously learn it is dangerous.

I suspect that even in heaven, if we have bodies, a pain reflex will still be necessary. We need to know if we are doing harm to ourselves. But often we experience chronic pain that serves no real purpose but simply wears us down. We also experience pain that is not physical – for example, after the death of a loved one – and this pain can be long lasting, searing the soul. This reality suggests that there is more to pain than only sensory reactions. Perhaps there is both “good and bad” pain, and in heaven we will lose only the bad pain.

Empathy

While we have known for some time that people insensitive to pain need to be explicitly taught to look out for their physical safety, an interesting side issue has more recently been explored. If you are insensitive to pain, are you able to empathize with others? Is pain insensitivity associated with a loss of empathy for the pain of others? It is easy to ask individuals insensitive to pain if they can recognize suffering in others, but how would you know if their answer reflected the same mental awareness that we experience? When friends say they had a finger stuck in a car door, we all shudder because we have experienced this or similar

pain ourselves. If you don't experience pain, do you shudder when told that a car door slammed on someone's thumb?

A few years ago people with insensitivity to pain were put into a brain imaging device, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI, which looks at what areas of the brain are currently active), then compared to normal individuals in their reaction to the pain of others. Both groups were shown pictures of painful events and faces of people experiencing pain, and in both groups the same areas of the brain were active. These findings suggest that people with pain insensitivity are able to understand the pain of others because they still have the same emotional structures in their brain. In the journal *Neuron* Danziger, Faillenot and Peyron suggest that having common brain emotional structures may be why we can sympathize with someone's feelings despite never having experienced a similar situation. This brain-wired ability may help to cement our social interactions.

As Christians we can stand in awe that our Lord wired our brains to allow us to empathize

with others. We need to stand with and love those who are experiencing the pain and brokenness of this world. The circuitry of our brains permit us to do this, but simply because we have the circuitry does not mean we will use it to its full extent. If we do not look, or choose to look away, we will not share with our neighbours their pain and joy and consequently be isolated from them and our Lord. ➤

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who is very pain-sensitive, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

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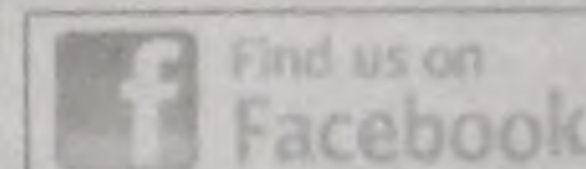
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Infrastructure continued

spending. The federal government did add another \$5.5 billion in capital spending as part of the Economic Action Plan in response to the global economic crisis in 2009.

The federal government is claiming credit for reducing the average age of Canada's core public infrastructure from 17 years in 2001 to 14.7 years in 2010. As the current plan is coming to an end, the federal government released *Building for Prosperity: Public Infrastructure in Canada* to initiate discussions for a future replacement program. The federal initiative is intended to focus not on infrastructure as an end in itself, but rightly reminds us that well developed and maintained infrastructure is a key driver for economic prosperity. It will help improve Canada's global competitiveness, it involves safe and secure borders, it is important for public health, and when well designed and built can help protect the environment. And while a discussion document of this nature draws input from the usual interest groups, individual Canadians may certainly weigh-in and contribute to the design of future capital programs. Readers may want to look at the website: infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/ref/presentations/fcm2012/fcm-eng.html#plan

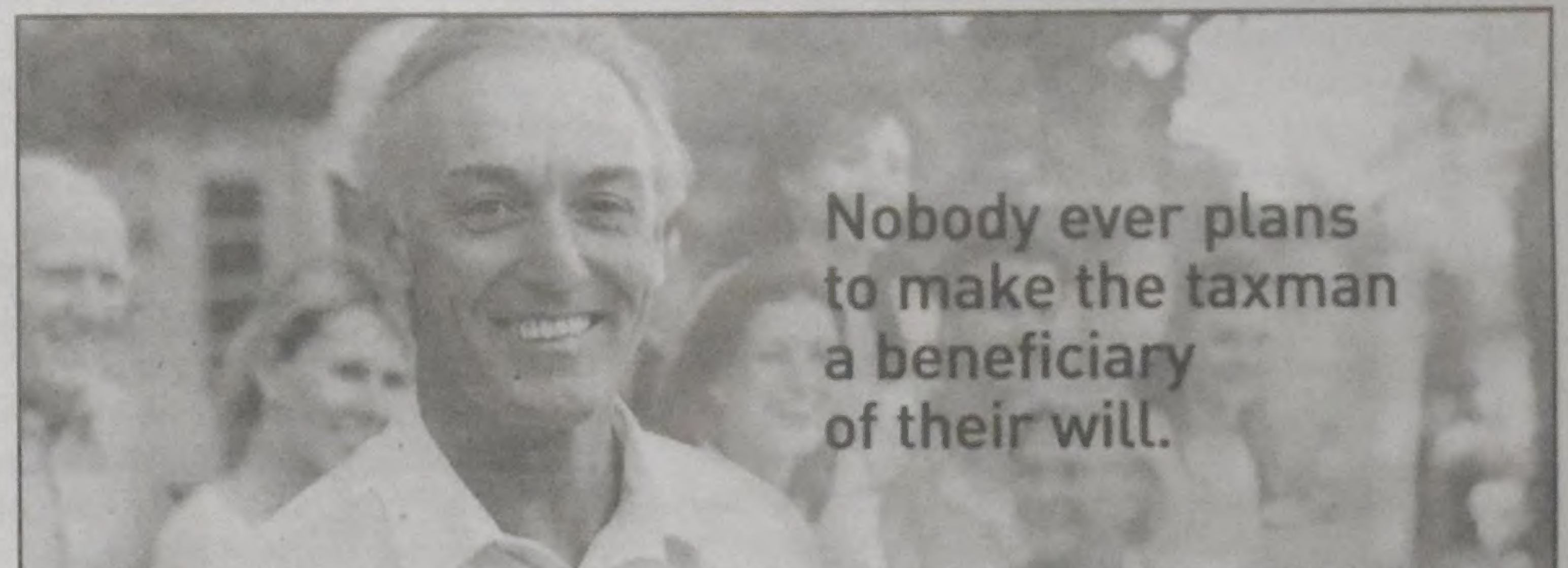
Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for Strategic Capital Planning.



It affects us all

One of the messages from the tragedy of the mall roof and bridge collapses is that we should not be so complacent about the state of repair (or disrepair) of the infrastructure on which we depend. While we understandably push governments for more and better quality access to what we want, we should be as concerned that governments and private sector owners maintain existing facilities.

As a startling example, those of us who have ever visited an old folks' home to see family members or participate in a service have a sense that the 30 to 40 year-old facilities are not up to par. In Alberta, public documents about *Aging in Place* have indicated that 7,000, or about half, of the over 14,000 long-term care beds in the province need upgrading and repair. We should tell our governments to put some priority on projects like these even if it means dealing with a little less elsewhere. Take an interest in the state of these and other facilities – one day you too may have to depend on them. ➤



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Editorials

The mystery of prayer



Judy Cook

In 1982, after graduating from Dordt College and in the process of establishing myself in one of the helping professions in Hamilton, Ont., I volunteered for a time with the Children's Aid Society. At noon we would all sit in a circle to eat lunch – social workers, other staff, volunteers. After our communal meal some of the CAS staff often played bridge or euchre for the rest of the lunch hour.

I had been taught that, in order not to deny Christ and in order to be a credible witness, I should pray (silently) before eating my lunch – even in the very public context of a CAS staff group. I struggled with that a bit, not wanting to draw attention to myself as a new volunteer, but in the end also not wanting to deny my Lord. Those prayers I prayed were mostly quick and self-conscious “Lord bless this food” kind of prayers.

One time I overheard one of the workers, who was looking for a fourth hand to play bridge, respond to someone else who suggested my name that “no, Judy is a Christian, so I doubt if she would play cards.” I was stunned that my desire to obey as well as be a witness for Christ resulted in an understandable judgment about who he actually is, and therefore also who I am as his follower.

Now I no longer pray before meals in public places. Over time and experience I have learned to lean more towards the Apostle Paul's proclivity to “becoming all things to all people” in public contexts (1 Cor. 9:20-22). Public prayer-as-witness no longer seems credible to me. Exactly what type of prayer *does* represent Christ in a public forum continues to elude me 30 years after this incident.

Jesus' disciples of 2000 years ago also thought prayer was a mystery. They asked Jesus for help in learning to pray and Jesus, of course, helped them. He provided a skeleton prototype prayer which still today helps to remind us that God is holy; that our priority in prayer-focus must be his kingdom and his will; that God will supply our needs; that we have to learn to withstand our proclivity to accept Satan's lies about ourselves and God and need deliverance; that God is sovereign. When the structure of the Lord's Prayer is clothed with our personal adoration, needs and hunger for God, it is prayer that comes to life – a mystery.



Prayer as conversation

The most mysterious type of praying is conversational, when “two or three are gathered in my name” to pray into the will of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like the Lord's Prayer, this type of praying also has its own structure. It is “conversational” because we (i.e., two or more of

us) are talking and listening; it demands that we listen to each other as well as to God. It does not work as “conversation” if one person's prayers predominate and others simply listen in; it is prayer because we have invited the Holy Spirit to lead us and are focusing our attention on God. Together we approach his throne through shared adoration and thanksgiving.

Prayer as conversation happens when all members of the group agree to pray “as long as it takes” around only one subject or person or need at a time, until a shared silence indicates the group is ready to move to the next item for prayer. And it is under the authority of the Holy Spirit if the group asks him to bring to our collective minds what he desires us to focus on.

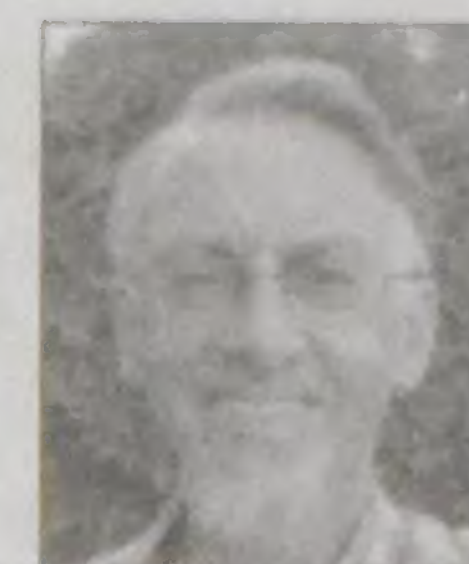
How a small group approaches God is, of course, also a mystery. Together we “envision” God, i.e., use our abilities to imagine who God is; how Jesus sits on the throne. But we are also open to having the Holy Spirit use our imaginations to reveal to us his desire. We accept that it is biblical to receive “words of knowledge” and that “praying in tongues” and receiving an “interpretation” is one way God speaks to us; in short, we have agreed together that we want to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to pray the will of God for a particular situation, person or need, and open ourselves up to maximize the power of God as it is joined to our weakness. We listen and hear what the Holy Spirit wants us to know, in order to be able to pray “in Jesus' name.” This, of course, requires humility. It requires an openness to, and acceptance of, each other's quirks, shortcomings, differences, expectations, etc., and it requires a trust that God will guide and refine us, as well as use us to accomplish his will.

All kinds of praying is “powerful and effective.” This was amply demonstrated at the Christian Reformed Church of North America's Synod of 2012, held at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont. in June. Those of us who had signed up to pray (volunteers from each CRC in Classis Hamilton under the leadership of Ancaster CRC) experienced the leading of the Holy Spirit through the many and varied ways of praying. From the reciting of written prayers to the repetition of rote praying to the more fluid experience of conversational prayer, all prayers were prayed in faith and expectation that God hears and that he answers. Synod this year dealt with some very difficult issues: A judicial code ruling affecting Maranatha CRC in Belleville and Classis Quinte; the status of the Belhar Confession after a year-long debate in many churches and classes within the CRCNA; the Creation Stewardship Task Force's work and the politicized debate around climate change – all were bathed in prayer, as were many personal prayer needs expressed by individual delegates.

How God answers these prayers remains a mystery, but *that* God uses them to our benefit and toward the building up of his church and the coming of his kingdom is foundational to what we all believe. ✕

Judy Cook is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ont.

Not all pictures and stories tell the truth



Bert Witvoet

In July this summer, newspapers in the Western world showed photos of a woman being executed in Afghanistan. She had been accused of adultery. Some readers found these pictures gruesome and criticized the editors for publishing them. I myself thought it appropriate to show graphically what is being done to women in the name of Allah. We might have skipped over the story if it had not been for these visual reminders of what is still happening in closed societies based on primitive standards of justice.

The pictures were hard to look at. A lonely woman draped in her long cloak and head covered with a hijab sits on the ground with her back to the camera. A second picture shows dozens of men sitting on a hillside watching the proceedings. In a third picture, a man with a gun approaches the woman from behind. In the fourth picture he has shot her and the woman lies crumpled on the ground. Sharia justice has been administered.

I had a problem with the pictures, too, but not because they were too graphic. My problem is that a lot of women and two important men are missing in these pictures. First of all, where are the women of this village? Is their standing so low that they are not needed even as witnesses in a court of justice? Secondly, where is the man who committed adultery with this woman? Why was he not shot? Does Sharia law always excuse the man? Was he a mere victim of a lustful and fickle woman? Thirdly, what is missing is another man sitting on the ground next to the woman, writing in the dirt with a stick, and shouting to the hypocritical men on the hillside: “He who is without sin, shoot the first bullet!”

The absence of the women of the village and the two men reveal the extent to which the religion of Islam with its Sharia laws has missed the restorative power of the Son of Man promised centuries ago to a broken and sinful world. Muslims acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah and even that he will return before the end of time, but they do not see him as the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world. They do not believe that Jesus was crucified or resurrected. And they certainly do not believe that Jesus is in the business of destroying the legalistic and chauvinistic patterns of this world.



This Afghani woman was violently attacked for appearing in public without a male, a violation of Sharia law.

Not long ago here in the Western world we used to burn at the stake or execute witches, prostitutes, homosexuals and other “deviants.” As such the Muslims were and are not alone in denying the restoring and healing powers that emanate from Christ. ✕

Bert Witvoet counts among his ancestors a Maria Witvoet, who was decapitated in Almelo, the Netherlands, in 1649 because she was accused of being a witch. He honours her memory.

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Letters

Questioning election

Marian Van Til's article on Election was about as succinct as they come (CC July 23). Detailed and fine tuned in a Reformed kind of way.

But, like anyone else wearing very large tight blinders provided by the Canons of Dort, she missed one important point.

That is: "WHY?" WHY did God elect some and not others?

The answer is as plain as day once you take the blinders off.

Let us start with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:3, where God promises "through you all the peoples of the earth will be blessed." Then to Moses in Exodus 19:6: "You will be to me a kingdom of priests." That is pretty special and pretty significant, because priests have a specific role to play. Priests restore the relation between God and sinners by offering sacrifices for them.

So a nation of priests has a special role too. They are to mediate between God and all the nations on the earth. That is the purpose of their election. Not to be elected to eternity and the rest be damned, but the rest be saved through the work of this nation of priests. They did not do a very good job of it most of the time, but that is why Jesus came to be the perfect "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" as John the Baptist knew so well (John 1:29).

We have not done a very good job of it either because we, like the religious leaders of old, have argued for centuries about who is in and who is not, completely ignoring the elephant in the room that our task as followers of Jesus is to be priests in his name (1 Peter 2:5-6). That is why we are elected: to do a job in the name of the King! Eternal salvation will take care of itself and does not need us to argue about it.

Ambassadors for Jesus. That is why we were elected "from all the nations of the earth" to go to them and reconcile them with God in the name of Jesus. If we fail to do that the name of God is not honoured as it should be, yet even so this will not prevent God from implementing the restoration of the relationship he has with all the people whose sins Jesus has taken away (see John 1:29 again).

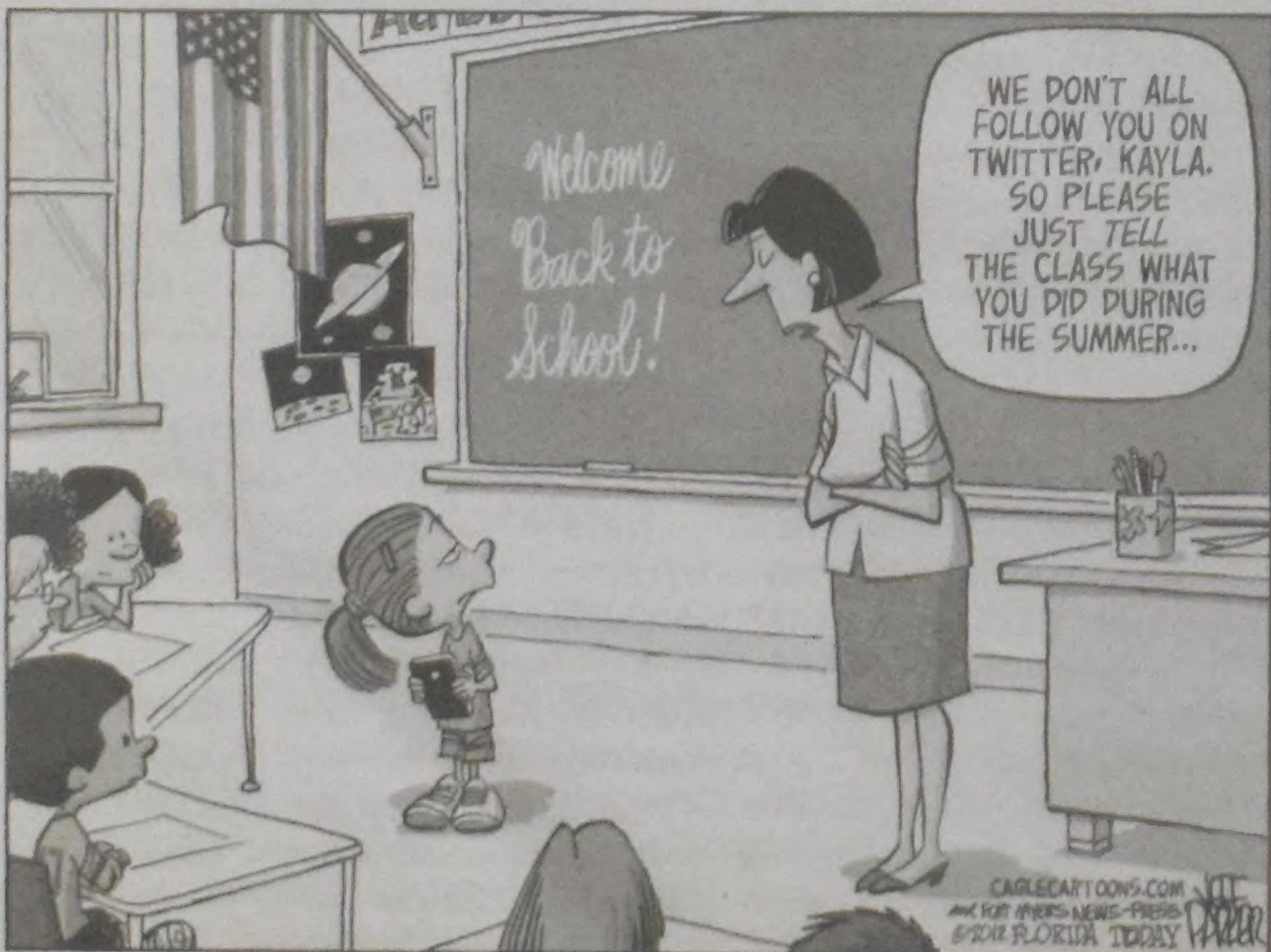
Jack Van Meggelen

Toronto, Ont. (Still living close to Hoggs Hollow)

Marian Van Til responds:

Would it surprise you to know that I haven't read the Canons of Dort in a long time? If I have blinders on they must come from reading the Bible, first of all, and then from the Catechism, Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries, and contemporary Christian writers, some Reformed, some not. As I tried to make clear, I agree that we don't need to argue about "who is in and who is out." We need only to live the Gospel and spread it, and let God "give the increase," as Paul puts it. God himself says through Isaiah, Paul and others that *why* he chooses some and not others is not ours to answer – or even to ask. And we must beware. Accusing God of getting things wrong is sin: "Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22).

If Jack Van Meggelen is suggesting that our "mediating between God and all the nations of the earth" in Christ's name will result in no human being suffering damnation, he seriously misreads the Bible (although I certainly understand the desire to think this). "Universalism" is really another weighty topic, and will come up in a future column about "limited atonement." In the meantime, food for thought: the person in Scripture who talks most frequently about the reality of hell is Jesus himself. He ought to know!



Comment

Weeding out worry

Louis M. Tamminga

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema wrote a fine article on worrying in the July 9 issue of *Christian Courier*: timely and interesting.

VanderVeen Feddema devotes the first part of her article to a helpful description of the nature of worrying and adds good advice. My problem comes with the second half of her article. To strengthen her warning against worrying still further, she places it under severe moral judgment. She writes: "Worry is refusing to trust in God", "Worry is infidelity [to God]" and "His words are a command, not a request. That's how serious an issue it is."

The words she is referring to – Jesus' injunction against worrying – are part of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. The Sermon on the Mount is special and unique. As spoken by Jesus, it is the constitution of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 6:33). It is striking how many commands Jesus incorporated in the Sermon. I counted as many as 33, and "Do not worry" is one of them.

Are these commands in the Sermon on the Mount on the order of the moral law of the Ten Commandments? I think not. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of Christ's Kingdom on earth. And the many commands of Jesus are a summary of the identity of the citizens of the Kingdom. Rather than new commandments they are observations of the excellence of our Kingdom status, couched in grammatical imperative mood. With his coming Christ ushered in the new world order of his Kingdom. Believers enter that Kingdom not by the obedience they can muster, but by grace. That grace becomes theirs by faith in the Author of the Sermon: Jesus Christ our Saviour.

It is also important to note that believers in this New Testament dispensation cannot yet live the Kingdom blessedness to the full. In the way of godliness, that Kingdom bliss is growing in their hearts and lives but not yet to perfection. Think, for instance, of this imperative of Jesus: "Be perfect, therefore, as your Father is perfect" (Matt. 6:48). Can we in every respect be perfect? No, but in the power of the Spirit of the Kingdom we strive for perfection. In his power we fight worrying. We struggle, we succeed, we fall, we stand up, we repent, we prevail, we fight the good

Louis Tamminga is a retired Christian Reformed minister. He served churches in British Columbia, Alberta, Iowa, and Ontario. From 1983 to 1995 he was the denomination's Director of Pastor-Church Relations Services. He is the author of the *Elders Handbook*.



fight of faith. And we encourage each other not to worry. But when Jesus tells us not to worry, he does not condemn us; rather, he encourages us and reminds us that we walk in his good company in the new order of his Kingdom.

Oswald Chambers, who VanderVeen Feddema quotes (with approval), says: "It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity [to God]." Indeed, this is a severe saying. I do not recognize the mind of Christ in those words of condemnation. Chambers does not, in this instance, provide encouragement to those under the burdens and pain of life. Chambers tells people who worry that they failed twice: they worry (bad practice!) and they are guilty of infidelity to their Lord. Failure now burdened with guilt! (Note: Chambers, who was born in Scotland in 1874, never freed himself completely from Puritan theology.)

Remember that worry is not an isolated emotion by itself. We humans are very complex beings. So many factors have gone into our personal make-up; our inner lives are filled with good and bad realities, happy and sad relationships, and sweet and bitter memories. Together they account for a gift we all have: spontaneity! In moments of crisis, when faced with threats, pain and danger, we respond with immediacy. Worry wells up. Sometimes more than other times, some believers more than other believers. But, rather than be beset by guilt, believers turn with their worry to the Saviour and never plead his grace in vain.

Finally, we also must realize that all this is closely connected with our mental health. Not many of us are completely mentally and emotionally whole. My heart goes out especially to those among us who struggle with depression. They may be assured of the Saviour's love and grace, and the reality of acceptance. They need not be chided for being guilty when worrying. They need to be encouraged that the mercy of their Saviour is without limit. When the angel appeared to Mary, we read that she was greatly troubled. The angel's healing response: "Fear not Mary." One of the tenderest imperatives Jesus uttered (also for the depressed) was: "Fear not, little flock, for the Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

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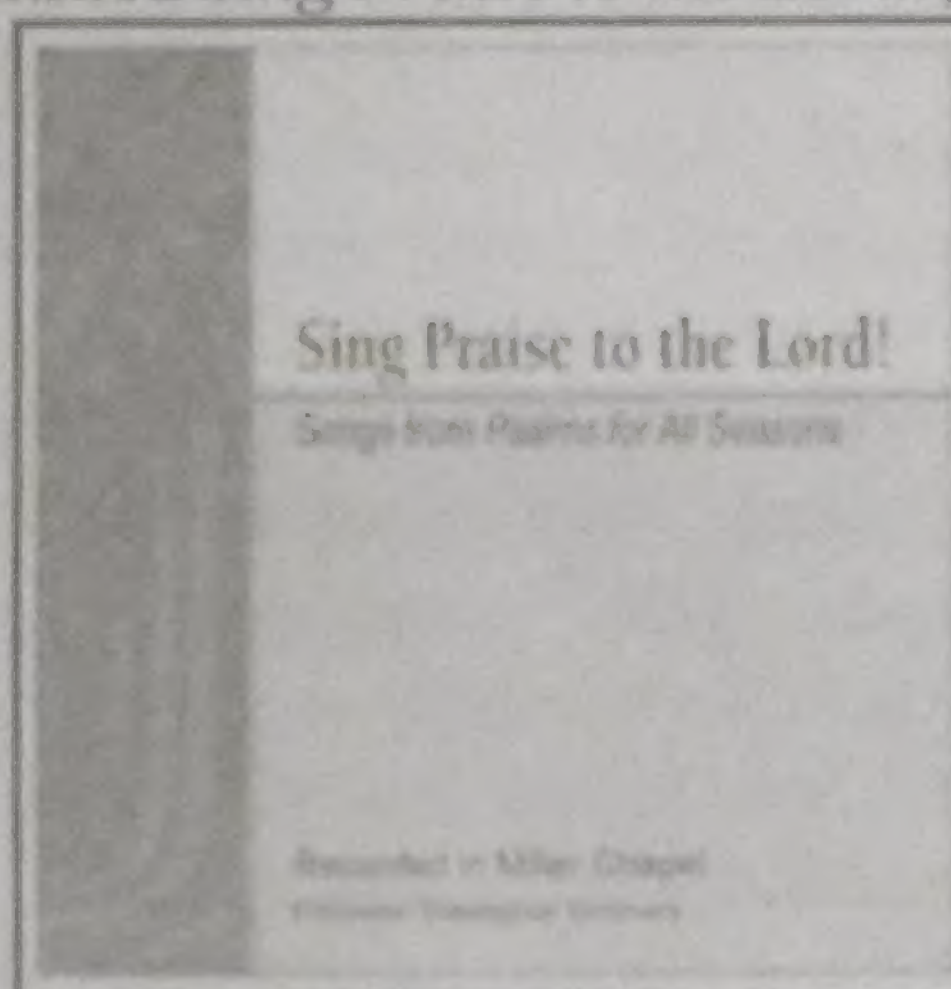
News

Calvin-Princeton collaboration produces Psalms CD

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (CRCNA) – Several songs from the recently released psalter *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship* are featured on a new 20-track CD performed by Princeton Theological Seminary's touring choir.

The psalter, featuring some 800 psalm settings, was published earlier this year by Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing agency of the Christian Reformed Church, Baker Publishing Group, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

The CD, entitled *Sing Praise to the Lord!*, is a collaboration between the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Princeton Theological Seminary.



A few tracks on the CD were recorded live at a psalm-singing festival in the fall of 2011. The rest of the 20 tracks were recorded in Princeton's Miller Chapel by members of the 2011-12 Princeton Seminary Touring Choir expressly for this CD collection.

Psalm settings on the CD include "The Lord is My Light," "Hear My Cry, O God, and Save Me" and "While I Keep Silence."

"We hope that together they may inspire and teach new ways of singing and praying psalms in worship," says a feature about the CD on the website of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

The CD, as well as the psalter itself, arises out of and nurtures the Reformed faith, say those who have worked on the projects. But the new psalter is also designed so that congregations in a spectrum of denominations can find many settings of familiar psalms that fit their approach to worship. There are psalm settings they can learn and use.

Martin Tel, director of music at Princeton Seminary, writes about the breath and beauty of the psalms.

"We address God and listen to God; we cry, complain, and confess; we give thanks, praise, and honor; we offer and receive blessing."

The CD can be bought as a disk or its contents downloaded over the internet. The psalter itself is available through the CRC's Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Britain: Just 0.006 percent of abortions done according to law

WESTMINSTER, UK (LifeSiteNews.com) – British law says that abortions may be performed before 24 weeks and only "where the termination is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman or to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman."

However, figures released by the Department of Health in mid-August show that of the over six million abortions committed in England and Wales since legalization in 1967, just 0.006 percent were performed for either of those reasons.

There have been more than six million abortions during that time. Yet "the figures reveal that in 99.5 percent of cases where an unborn child's life is ended there is no risk to the health of the mother," said Lord David Alton, a former Labour and Liberal Democrat Party MP, now member of the House of Lords who sits on a parliamentary pro-life committee.

"Other figures reveal that three teenage girls have had 24 abortions between them and that some women have had more than eight legal abortions," said Alton.



Abortions must be approved by two doctors, though it was recently revealed that this rule, too, is widely ignored. These rules have been interpreted by both doctors and judges so broadly that pro-life observers maintain that they have effectively permitted abortion on demand.

In 2002, Lord Justice Laws said, "There is some evidence that many doctors maintain that the continuance of a pregnancy is always more dangerous to the physical welfare of a woman than having an abortion, a state of affairs which is said to allow a situation of *de facto* abortion on demand to prevail."

Pro-life advocates have long maintained that there is no circumstance in which an abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother.

Earlier this year an eminent Irish oncologist, professor and politician, who is himself not pro-life, wrote that in all his years practicing he has never encountered a situation in which abortion was needed to save a mother's life. Dr. John Crown, who has lectured in 40 countries and is the author of 150 research papers told his Twitter followers that he had during his medical career faced some "hard decisions re: chemotherapy in pregnancy." However, he said, "I don't think I ever had a case where abortion was necessary to save mom."

U.S.: New Testament prof fired for orthodox beliefs

Marian Van Til, with files from *World*

ATLANTA, Georgia – Writing in *World* magazine, Leigh Jones reports, "Dr. Jamal-Dominique Hopkins thought his biblically orthodox views would be welcome at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). After all, the Atlanta-based seminary teaches gay theology, womanist theology, and liberation theology. But earlier this year, Hopkins found that biblically orthodox theology stretched the school's desire for diversity beyond its limit."

World noted that in February of this year Hopkins, who is black, invited Dr. Alice Brown-Collins, director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Black Campus Ministries in the New England Region, to speak to a group of conservative students on campus. "Despite its diverse theological teachings, the school's student body comes from the black church, which mostly retains an orthodox interpretation of Scripture. After her presentation, Brown-Collins gave one of the students a copy of *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* by Robert Gagnon."

Leigh Jones of *World* reported that the next day "Hopkins' department chair grilled him about the meeting, the book and his association with InterVarsity, an evangelical Christian campus ministry." The situation violated the ITC's code of ethics, "which pledges the school's commitment to a diversity that includes sexual orientation," Dr. Margaret Aymer told Hopkins. "When he rose to leave, Aymer warned him he had

put his job at risk."

Three months later, the school dismissed Hopkins, who, in turn, has filed a discrimination complaint against ITC with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Hopkins says the ITC discriminated against him for his evangelical beliefs and his sex, Hopkins says. According to *World*, Hopkins also asserts that ITC administrators "engaged in a deliberate attempt to humiliate him and damage his reputation by changing his students' grades, in violation of school policy." No one at ITC was willing to comment in response to *World's* questions.



Orthodox students, unorthodox faculty

ITC is currently a coalition of eight historically black seminaries. It originally earned its charter in 1958. From its inception its focus was ecumenical, but over time it became less and less biblically orthodox. By the time Hopkins arrived in 2008 his conservative biblical views were held by only a tiny minority of his colleagues. "The faculty tends to be very liberal," Hopkins told *World*. "But the student body mainly come from the black church, so it's conservative and orthodox. There's tension there."

Despite his orthodoxy, ITC at first touted

Hopkins as "the only African-American New Testament theologian with expertise in the Dead Sea Scrolls." They also allowed him to choose his textbooks.

Hopkins was the one of three New Testament professors who didn't advocate for "queer theology," which "seeks to redefine Christian teachings about gender and sexuality." He never thought his beliefs might get him fired, however. Not long before he was fired, in fact, he had been promoted and given a raise.

Hopkins told *World* that after Aymer threatened his job, he filed a formal grievance with the ITC. But administrators didn't even "acknowledge his complaint for two months, during which Aymer continued to write negative reviews of Hopkins." Aymer also tried to make a case against him "by calling former colleagues and fellow theologians," Hopkins said. And she told him the orthodox texts he used in his New Testament classes had to go.

"She said none of the books gave the current scholarly view of the New Testament," Hopkins said, adding, "She said I needed more books conducive to womanist theology, post-colonial theology or LGBT [lesbian, gay, trans-gendered] theology."

Epitomizes intolerance

Adding insult to injury, "At the end of the semester, when one student emailed Hopkins to ask when his grade would be changed, Hopkins learned administrators

had started changing his students' final grades," *World* reported. "Ten students, several of whom had gotten grades of F from Hopkins, ended up with grades of C or better. One student's F became an A-." One student told *World* that changing the grades not only did a disservice to the students and the ITC but damaged Hopkins' reputation. It was "an act of retaliation," the student said.

Dr. Robert Gagnon, whose book started Hopkins' trouble, told *World* that the ITC's response "epitomizes the intolerance of professors promoting a gay agenda in academia today. Their end game is not tolerance for homosexualist views but rather the persecution and removal of any who dare think for themselves and question such views. They cannot allow even reasoned discussion or debate."

World noted that "Hopkins hopes to resolve his dispute with ITC without going to court. But ITC officials have refused to participate in a mediation session requested by the EEOC, which opened an investigation into Hopkins' discrimination claims. ITC also faces an unrelated investigation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools over a lack of compliance with accreditation requirements."

While waiting for an EEOC ruling, Hopkins is working on an initiative to reform theological teaching. During his time at ITC, students told Hopkins they didn't have a voice when it came to the erosion of orthodoxy in their training.

News

U.S. Catholic business owner: Obama said 'Abandon your faith' or shut your business

WASHINGTON, D.C. (LSN) – The owner of a Catholic family business that won an injunction against the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate in the “Obamacare” law is speaking out.

Paul Newland noted that the Obama administration argued that faithful Catholics (and presumably other Christians) have no right to practice their faith in their own businesses. But Newland says that’s impossible. “Faith is not a two-hours-on-Sunday-morning event. It’s a lifestyle that we live – and have for 50 years.”

Newland’s company, Hercules Industries, is in Denver, Col. Hercules is a heating ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) business that expanded from a mom-and-pop operation to a bustling business that employs 265 people. It “has been built over three generations, but really faith and values are our core,” Newland says.



Paul Newland right and his son James.

In their legal brief, Obama administration lawyers stated that the Newland family “made no showing of a religious belief which requires that [it] engage in the [HVAC] business.” Any burden on its religious belief is therefore caused by its “choice to enter into a commercial activity.”

In arguing that the Newland’s company *must* pay for contraception, abortifacients or sterilization for any employees who request them (as the HHS mandate requires), the administration artfully turned the government’s compulsion of the Newland family upside-down, claiming, “The owners of Hercules Industries have no right to control the choices of their company’s employees, many of whom may not share the Newlands’ religious beliefs.”

Sophie’s choice

“ObamaCare puts us in a really bad position,” Newland said. “You can either choose to abandon your faith – and you clearly know how we feel about that – or you can pay millions of dollars of fines that would eventually cripple our business and harm the company and all of its employees.”

On July 27, Senior Judge John L. Kane of the U.S. District of Colorado granted the Newlands a temporary injunction against the HHS mandate. He ruled the administration’s lawyers had not shown they had complied with the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which says the government must not “substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” except to further “a compelling governmental interest” through “the least restrictive means” possible.

The patriarch of the Newland family says every American should be concerned about the outcome of this case. “This is not just about Hercules. This is about something much, much more greater at stake, and that’s our freedom.”

Federal attorneys now must prove they have used the least restrictive means possible to achieve the government’s aims, in accordance with statutory law. Judge Kane has not yet considered the First Amendment issue of the free practice of religion.

Observers say that the issue will no doubt come before the U.S. Supreme Court (if Obama is re-elected and the healthcare law stands in its current form). The Catholic League’s outspoken president, Bill Donohue, told Catholic business owners, “The time to revolt is now.”

CRWRC is ‘equipping the vulnerable’ in South Sudan

JUBA, South Sudan (CRWRC) – This month the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) launched a new “livelihood initiative” for families in the Republic of South Sudan who have returned to the region after living as refugees for decades.

In partnership with the World Food Programme, this five-month Food for Assets (FFA) program provides a partial food ration and is equipping 980 South Sudanese returnees throughout Yei River County, Central Equatoria with the agricultural tools and training they need for fruitful livelihoods in the world’s newest country.

CRWRC has been at work in South Sudan for the past three years, joining with communities to improve agricultural production and food security. While that program continues, this new project was started in response to the recent influx of South Sudanese into their region of origin.

In 2010, there were 700,000 South Sudanese living in the northern part of what was then known simply as Sudan. Having fled there to escape violence during Sudan’s decades-long civil war, many of these southern families have little recollection of their original homelands. When the conflict ended in 2010, however, families left refugee camps and hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese returned to this region to begin to make a life for themselves.

Last year, South Sudan declared its independence and became its own country. The government of Sudan asked all South Sudanese living in the North to switch their citizenship and set a May 8, 2012, deadline. Those that did not conform to this mandate have now been expelled, causing a mass return to South Sudan.

Urgent situation

Although South Sudan is rich in agricultural land, most returnees have neither the training nor the tools to make a living after so many years in camps and the industrial-based economy of the North. Some are elderly caretakers providing for children abandoned by their parents. Others have been abandoned by their own spouses. Inflation has also led to rising food costs, increasing the risk of extreme poverty. As a result, many families have gone down to one meal a day in order to survive.

“You cannot help but be moved talking to these people,” said Albert Dizon, CRWRC South Sudan country representative and program director, speaking of the returnees he has met facing these very situations. “They know they are in an urgent situation, and they are eager to help themselves.”

CRWRC’s new Food For Assets project is specifically targeting the most vulnerable returnees: the elderly, the disabled still able to work and the women who are sole



Some of the women participants during the consultation with CRWRC. Many voiced concerns over unemployment, poverty and hunger, experienced particularly by female-headed households.

household providers. The project was planned and developed in consultation with the Returnees Association in Yei River County. It provides a food subsidy and equips families with the tools and training to grow and harvest their own food.

Wide-ranging project

In four areas of Yei River County participants are learning basic agricultural practices. They will then open their own acre of land. CRWRC will provide them with seed, tools and a daily ration of cereal, pulses, oil and salt in exchange for their labour. The project is structured in such a way that after new returnees are trained and mentored in farming techniques and practice, they will train others already living in South Sudan.

“This formula allows two kinds of families and individuals to be helped at the same time. New residents and those already established can work the land together,” explains Dizon.

It is estimated that 6,780 members of resident communities will receive better food security as a result of the project. “We’re hoping the participants will be able to continue on and make their agricultural livelihoods sustainable,” says Dizon. “And God willing we will be able to see more projects like this for returnees in need.”

“The partnership with the WFP (World Food Programme) is very exciting as WFP will provide some of the funding for the costs of running the training as well as the food. This is the first time CRWRC South Sudan has received funding from the WFP and may be the beginning of a great new relationship” adds Ken Little, senior project manager. “But not all the costs of the project are covered by the agreement, so it is critical that additional funds be found to cover the costs of the seeds and tools.”

CRWRC requests that its supporters pray for the South Sudanese as they learn new agricultural techniques and rebuild a society.

Pakistan: Christian leader falsely charged with blasphemy in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AsiaNews) – Pakistan’s blasphemy law has been used once again to bring unsubstantiated charges against members of religious minorities. Rev. Zafar Bhatti, president of the Jesus World Mission, is in prison after he was accused of violating the “black law.” Judges now must decide whether or not to heed the appeal made on his behalf and release him on bail.

A Muslim leader asserts that the Christian pastor-priest sent him text messages that insulted Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Catholic and other Christian leaders and human rights activists responded immediately, pleading his innocence, noting that police has been subjected to pressures and that the case was corrupted by errors in law.

Bhatti is from Karachi, but moved to Lahore in 2010, in Nawaz Sharif Colony, where he has worked on behalf of local Christians and religious minorities for the past two years. On July 10 he decided to move with his family to the capital, Islamabad. The next day, Ahmed Khan, deputy sec-

retary of the local Jamat Ehl-e-Sunnat, unexpectedly filed a complaint against the Christian clergyman at the New Town police station in Rawalpindi.

According to the police report, Khan received some text messages on his mobile phone with insulting language towards Muhammad’s mother. The messages came from an unregistered but visible number, which he kept in the phone’s memory. At the police station, he said that if the agents did not open an investigation for blasphemy under article 295-C of the Penal Code, his organization would take matters in its own hands.

Police arrested Rev. Bhatti on July 16, and also his sister-in-law Nasreen Bibi. In custody, Bhatti was physically abused and tortured to extract a confession, but he stood his ground, rejecting the accusation and insisting on his innocence.

His wife turned to All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) asking for justice. “Zaffar Bhatti is innocent,” said Khalid Jill of APMA. “We are going to fight for his release.”

Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



When love makes brave the timid soul



There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)

My palms are rough and I don't feel very brave, sobbing into them. Trent has hurt my feelings because we're both tired, and there are four pairs of eyes

watching and it's too much sometimes. So I go to my room and sit on our feather tick and cry. And I ask God to fill me up with so much grace that there won't be room for anger.

I didn't feel brave this morning, either, stepping onto the deck to empty the garbage and finding birds singing, closing the door on boys arguing and just standing there. Until a snotty nose pressed against the glass and pulled me back in.

I doubt these boys feel brave, either, in this place filled with new sounds and colours. Even my laundry smells different than their mother's.

And I doubt she feels brave, their mother, sending them off and asking for help this way, but she is. One of the bravest women I know, because *bravery is leaning into love*. Bravery is knowing you can't do it and believing someone else can, then asking them to.

It's not about carrying yourself. Maybe it's about realizing you need something, like the song of the birds, or the help of friends, to get you through the day, but it's not about helping yourself. It's about humbling yourself.

"I'm afraid of everything," my foster son tells me in the dark on his pillow. I put my hand on his head, like a covering. "So am I," I whisper. Because really, we're all broken pottery. Still intact, but barely. Yet if it weren't for the cracks, like Leonard Cohen said, the light couldn't get through.

It's more than singing these days. "Jesus" is something Jimmy says all of the time, now, like water, or bread, or Lego, like he's learning a new word and he doesn't want to forget it.

But then there is everything else. Like the fact that he is sleeping with the stuffy his daddy bought him. His daddy, who beat up his mommy. His daddy, who never came to Jimmy's birthday.



We're all broken pottery. Still intact, but barely. Yet if it weren't for the cracks, like Leonard Cohen said, the light couldn't get through.

And every day during quiet time, he colours a picture for his mommy, whom he's terrified of forgetting, and after a really good day he always cries for her. He's loyal that way.

This morning I was helping him get dressed for church, and it was very important to him that he look cool. I remembered that Jimmy's dad used to make fun of him if he wore certain clothes, and that he wouldn't let his son cry because then he'd be a girl.

I'm trying to respect this image of family that Jimmy clings to, because it's all that he has. Sometimes he pushes Aiden, because Aiden has a

mommy and a daddy, and Caleb calls me mommy now. But Jimmy never will. I am "Auntie Em" to him, and that's the way I want it to be. Because his mommy is my friend, and she's one of the bravest women I know.

But it's hard. It's hard to know how to love her children without making them mine. Without falling so hard I'll forget to respect the line.

So we're calling on Jesus a lot around here, especially on Sundays. Because every Sunday, it feels like the prayers just kind of run out. Maybe because people are in church?

I don't know. But Sundays are always hard. I'm always irritable and today Trenton was sick and the boys were wild, like they'd just eaten an entire chocolate cake, and all I wanted was a latte and a laptop.

So I cried Jesus and I painted a little during nap-time. And I emptied myself of Emily so I could be filled again with God. Because in the end, he's all the family we need.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.* ✨

Emily Wierenga's website is at emilywierenga.com and she lives in Neerlandia, Alta.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



I'm finally coming out: I love technology. Someone wrote me a note and said something like this: "It must be nice to live on a farm with a few cows and live the old-fashioned way." It's true: I love living on a farm, with a few cows and chickens, a garden ... *and technology.*

In her essay on "Responsible Engineering and Technology," Gayle Ermer of Calvin College says that "technology encompasses all built and manufactured things." She goes on to paraphrase Stephen Monsma: "technology is a human cultural activity. It includes all of the process of conceiving, designing, building, producing, implementing, using, maintaining, and refining objects and systems for practical uses."

And so I introduce you to some of the technology that makes my life easier. Take the scythe for example. I can cut grass and weeds (when things go well) much faster and easier than I could pull them out with my hands. And then there is the weed-cutter. Yesterday Betsey went out and tried our new cutter in the pasture: she beheaded thistles with concentration as well as glee.

Our scythe unfortunately gets dull. Then my friend Steffen comes onto the scene. "Curt, Curt, you can't sharpen that only with a stone. You have to *peen* it first." Not an expert on peening, or even sure if the comment was in good taste, I enquired further. Steffen raced home and came back with a peening bench and a ball-peen hammer. After about a half-hour the steel edge was tapped (peened) thinner; the burrs could be taken off with a whetstone. (Steffen's whetstone is carried in a cow-horn filled with water; I spit on mine because our cows' horns are still attached to the cows.)

Both of us also have gas-powered weed eaters, but frequently we use, maintain and refine our scythes. A couple years ago I scythed a tiny field of oats for hay. After it was dry, we raked it up with wooden hay rakes that we made ourselves. The handles are of willow and the teeth wooden dowels. Then we used more technology – pitchforks – to load the hay onto a little trailer pulled by Steffen's antique "quad." More technology. For a storage area we used a barn, but also the discarded back of an old pickup truck. We used our technology – a saw to make poles that extended the height of the stack and then covered the whole thing with used lumber tarps from the local lumber yard.

By now somebody is probably asking, "But where are the computers, iPhones and iPads?" My computer – upon which I am composing this piece – is in the house. But on that hay-making day we were too busy using appropriate technology to have time for computers.

Loss of skills

The other day my wife won a fabulous prize of technological devices at a company picnic: two hoes, a garden rake, a grass rake, a weed cutter, three shovels and an ice-chopper. All of these will be used regularly.

But what about the skills involved in using (cf. Monsma) technology? They are being lost. Who knows how to spade like Oma Meyer, pacing herself so that 1,000 square feet are turned over little by little in two weeks by an 80-year-old woman? Who can mow a lawn with a scythe like Steffen and Walter? I can't. Who can hoe rows of corn without decimating the crop or re-planting the wounded weeds?

Years ago, "life skills" classes in schools involved activities like changing a tire or changing the oil in a vehicle. Students learned how to sew, how to cook. In one of our local schools, elementary school students learned how to prepare soil, make compost, plant, harvest and cook the food they produced in the school garden. All using technology.

Unfortunately, however, high school technology courses are now almost exclusively concerned with electronics. As Ermer says, "Many people associate technology solely with electronic devices."

When I was a student in Christian college we often heard the Greek philosopher Protagoras mentioned with suspicion, disdain or harsh judgement because he is reported to have said, "Man is the measure of all things." "Humanism," we harrumphed. Today I fear we have moved to a world in which microcircuits are too small and factories too big to maintain a relationship with the human beings that use them.

Thankful for my rototiller, I am enamoured by my handmade wooden rake, which, by the way, I need to repair. Time to select another willow handle (no ash or hickory available). ✨

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) gets nasty looks from people for doodling with pen and pencil during serious discussions. He wonders whether fiddling with a laptop or iPhone would be more acceptable.



Reviews



Nomads, Prodigals and Exiles: insight into a new and old problem

Lynn Barger Elliott

You Lost Me is written for the church as a tool to assess and address the “new and old” problem of the absence of young adults (18-29 year olds) in the church. David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group and the co-author of *unChristian*, argues that though this issue has been a part of the lifecycle of churches in generations past, this time it is different and ultimately, more urgent. Different, in that due to technology, the young adults of this generation have experienced life and faith in a “discontinuous” way from any other generation. More urgent, in that unlike generations before them who returned to the church when they married and began raising their own families, this generation is entering these milestones at a later age and simply staying away.

You Lost Me

by David Kinnaman
Baker Publishing
Grand Rapids, MI: 2011

Kinnaman identifies three patterns in the way “Mosaics” drop out (Barna gave this generation this moniker due to their ability to expect and to relish diversity). First, there are “Nomads,” those who wander and claim they are Christian but are not compelled to be a part of a church. Second, there are “Prodigals,” those who left and no longer claim to be Christians. Thirdly, there are “Exiles,” those who continue to confess their Christian faith and stay with the church, but do not feel connected. (It is important to keep in mind that 30 percent of all young adults interviewed attend worship and 40 percent participate in the life of their church in some way. Many who attend their church feel connected in

a meaningful way.)

The strength of this book is Kinnaman’s foundational understanding of the church’s mandate as “disciple-making.” However, if its purpose is to create means for the passage of faith from one generation to another, it is now in crisis. Because this generation has grown up with completely different access to information, a sense of alienation from institutions, and an understanding of authority coming from multiple focal points, “the ability of one generation to convey the message and meaning of faith to the next... has been disrupted.” Herein lies the problem.

“You Lost Me” is a play on words, which establishes the framework for this conversation about today’s young adults. When they say, “you lost me,” they mean that they are still listening, they just don’t understand what it being said. Integral to Kinnaman’s plea to the church is that young adults are still listening, they just don’t understand what the church is saying. And this, Kinnaman argues, is both the diagnosis and the starting place for the church to address the issue.

While there is no one reason for the absence of young adults in the church, there are several reasons that presented themselves during his 35,000 interviews. As Kinnaman identified each of these, he was able to suggest a countermove for the church, which is theological and addresses the offending issue. Each of these countermoves, Kinnaman argues, is a place where the church can respond with re-focused efforts of disciple-making.

“The church is over protective.”

The church can offer methods and principals of discernment.

“The church’s faith is shallow.”

The church can focus on going deeper with a few individuals in an apprenticeship-style, rather than an emphasis on reaching higher numbers.

“The church’s stance is anti-science.”

The church can refocus on stewardship of all of creation.

“The church’s faith is sexually repressive, inadequate and ineffective.”

The church can focus on the community benefit of a sexual ethic, instead of the individual burden.

“The church community is exclusive.”

The church can embrace those who are “other.”

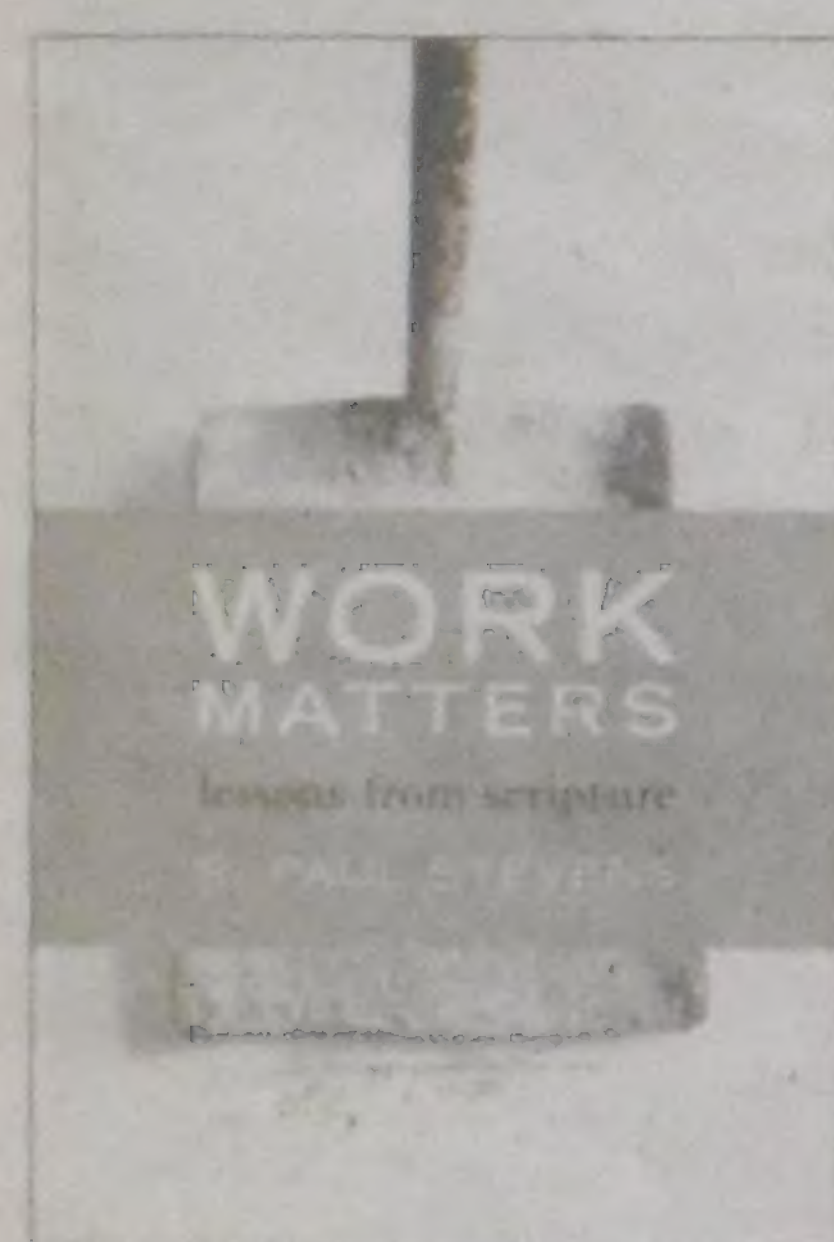
“The church’s faith disallows doubt.”

By turning doubting into doing, the church can create a culture of balance between faith and doubt by contextualizing doubts within the church’s mission.

And so Kinnaman calls for a new architecture of disciple-making. After identifying the issues that have most commonly been offered as reasons for leaving, Kinnaman challenges the church to engage in an intergenerational conversation about what it will take to effectively pass faith on. Integral to that process will be to examine how relationships occur between the generations, or even the non-chronological barriers that we erect in congregations. In doing so, he encourages the church to renew its teachings on vocation, so that our young may grasp the significance of their God-given gifts and opportunities. And in all that we do, Kinnaman pleads, do it in the spirit of wisdom, which ushers in grace.

Upon arguing his case theologically and sociologically, Kinnaman then opens the conversation up to church “experts” who offer “Fifty Ideas to Find a Generation.” I found the argument compelling, though not applicable to every church setting or every young adult, and the charge inspiring. It’s an important guide through a common problem in a new landscape.

Rev. Lynn Barger Elliott (lbe3@calvin.edu)
is Instructor for Youth Ministry at Calvin
College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Timecards and the life of faith: an inquiry into work

Nick Schuurman

I wouldn’t say I’ve made a practice of it, but from time to time (when I’ve grown weary of the CBC, or forgotten my iPod in my rush to leave in the morning) I tune into the local Christian radio station. There is a song that has been playing for the past little while, a new single by a musician who’s been making music for years now. The verses call out to normal people working normal jobs, “hooking up mergers and cooking up burgers,” and are punctuated by a chorus that rings: “Do everything you do to the glory of the One who made you”

Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture

by R. Paul Stevens
William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, MI: 2011

R. Paul Stevens, professor emeritus of marketplace theology and leadership at Regent College, has put together a Biblical theology of work along similar lines. While he argues that there are professions that no professing Christian can faithfully call their own, and many jobs that present complex moral problems, the list of possible career choices for devoted disciples of Christ is longer than people typically think.

The book takes the form of a sort of workplace tour through the Christian scriptures, like the kind you would receive if you went and visited a manufacturing plant or greenhouse and saw the employees. Like any good tour guide, Stevens has a firm grasp of the context and individuals whom he hopes to introduce readers to. From Bezalel, the carpenter

and artisan who served to help design and build the Israelite Tabernacle, and who was said to have been filled with the Spirit while he did so, to Ruth, whose labour for some time consisted of the survival work that so many men, women and children are familiar with still today. There is the work of leaders like David, Esther and Nehemiah, the labour of the poets and teachers of the Wisdom Books, and the calling of prophets to call for repentance, advocate for the poor, and be conduits for imaginative visions of the future. He profiles Martha (an example of contemplative work, he suggests), Aquila and Priscilla, Paul’s friends who, like him, made tents to support themselves, and ends with a visit to John and an inquiry into the nature of labour in heaven.

A diverse assortment of career choices, to say the least. And that is precisely part of the point that Stevens is getting at. “If it is true,” he writes, “that all human work that embodies God’s values and serves God’s goals is rightly called God’s work, then it follows that the old distinction between sacred work and so-called secular work can no longer be maintained.” Reformed readers, I am sure, will offer their “amen” to Stevens’ rejection of the division between “ministry” and “normal work,” as well as his affirmation of the pluriform nature of our redemptive work as Christians. He begins the book with the cultural mandate of the Genesis account, another hallmark of a Reformed understanding of work, and asserts that “the scope of redemption in Christ is the same as the scope of creation.”

While I agree, and affirm the notion that one can faithfully serve God in the context of the farm, office, classroom, hospital, board room, cockpit or group home, and that these vocations are of no less value or redemptive significance

than those of chaplains, pastors or theology professors, to what extent does this view of work serve to foster a sort of accommodation – of living and working in a manner indistinguishable from the rest of the world? And does it diminish the particular importance, and urgent nature of work that centers on questions of salvation and spiritual growth?

When Jesus walked up to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew on the shore of the sea of Galilee, he did not shake their hands and tell them that their work there was a legitimate expression of kingdom labour (as true as that may be), and that they should stick with fishing, because by doing so they could work to provide for their community and bring renewal to creation. He invited them to something different, and that involved leaving their boat behind. Soon after that, he calls Matthew, and we see the same thing: Jesus steps into this man’s office, so to speak, looks at him across the desk, and says, “follow me.”

So here’s the question I am left with at the end of this book: what happens when Jesus enters your workplace and tells you to drop whatever is in your hands and come follow him somewhere different? (And I don’t think calling is exclusively unidirectional – maybe you’re on your way to seminary and God would rather have you switch to trade school). While I agree with nearly everything Stevens has said in *Work Matters*, and heartily recommend the book, I have seen this understanding of work and vocation used so often as an excuse to stay put, settle, squander gifts and to legitimize questionable career choices.

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christian-courier.ca) is CC’s reviews editor.



Features

Christian Courier is delighted to announce the winner of our Third Annual Short Story Contest. The finalists were judged by Angela Reitsma Bick, editor, Nick Schuurman, reviews editor, Bert Witvoet, contributing editor, and Cathy Smith, features editor. We congratulate Ruth Anne Burrell, our winner, who will receive \$100 for her story, "Last Day."

Reitsma Bick had this to say about "Last Day:" "In deceptively sparse prose, this elegant short story introduces three very different main characters, one hot-button issue and no easy answers." *Cathy Smith, Features Editor.*

Last Day

Ruth Anne Burrell

There are 125,000 people like me on earth today, but that doesn't mean I'm not unique. I have a strong, beating heart – a heart to laugh, a heart to dance, a heart to love. I want to taste the cold rain of a spring thunderstorm, to feel the salty, summer ocean waves crashing over my body, to hear the crunch of fallen autumn leaves beneath my feet, to see the high winter mountains coated in snow. I want to live well.

I have less than 24 hours left.

He rolls over in bed, wishing Monday morning wouldn't come so soon as he slaps the "off" button on the alarm. As he sits and scrubs his face with his hands, his scratchy whiskers remind him he needs to shave. He shoves himself out of bed and stumbles toward the bathroom, hoping the cold shower spray will drive the fog from his mind.

He pauses next to the bathroom door to glance at the small calendar on the wall. Today's date punches him in the stomach. *Sept. 24.* He leans heavily on the door post. *It's been . . . how many?* he wonders. *Nineteen years?* He forces his gaze away from the calendar and continues into the bathroom. Shutting the door behind him, he stares into the mirror. His eyes are dark, bloodshot, with black shadows beneath them. *Too much time . . . too many memories.*

He changes his mind about the cold shower and turns on the hot water instead. Steam fills the small room. Maybe the memories can be burned away.

Thirty minutes later, he exits the house, dressed in his normal dark slacks, dress shirt and tie. Perhaps his work will help him forget the terrified expression in his wife's eyes just before she died 19 years ago.

I snuggle down to sleep. My bed feels soft, warm, safe. I dream about my tomorrows and what they could bring, what I could do. I wonder about who I could become. An artist? A musician? A doctor? A mother?

But my tomorrows will not be. Today is my last day.



She wakes with a sick feeling in her stomach. *I can't do this,* she thinks. She gets out of bed and crosses to the window, staring outside with her arms wrapped tightly around her waist. *I have to. I can't keep going on like this.* She leans her forehead against the glass of the window and its coolness seeps into her skin. The brisk breezes of fall had arrived only days before, and she was enjoying the relief from summer's hot rays.

She thinks about his angry face and harsh words. She remembers her mother's fierce whispers. She imagines her

father's cold silence and heavy fists. *I have no choice.*

Her shower is quick, but she takes special care while getting dressed and fixing her hair. She's not sure why. There's no one to impress. Not today.

She goes out to the driveway and climbs into the car. Her fingers tremble as she turns the key in the ignition and backs onto the street. "Stop it," she says aloud, scolding herself. "There's nothing to worry about. Everything will be fine."

Nothing to worry about. Her trembling increases.

As I wait, I wonder about those I could meet but will not. Mother, father, brothers, sisters? Grandparents, cousins, friends? I dream about a soul-deep friendship. Someone to share my hopes, fears, jokes and bad days with. A real friendship where you can talk, debate, yell or laugh as you choose. I wonder if there is a friend like that out there that I will never know. I wish I could stay and meet him or her. I wish I didn't have to go so soon.

"Good morning, Doctor." His secretary's words greet him as he enters the clinic.

"Good morning."

"How are you today?"

"Fine. I'm fine." It's a lie, of course, but she isn't looking for the truth. "How many appointments today?" he asks.

"Five," she says, handing him several file folders.

"Thank you." He grabs the papers, offers her a slight smile and heads to his office.

It is a cold, unwelcoming place, not really conducive to work. He does what he needs to each day and then returns home. He sits at his desk, opens the top drawer and digs through it, looking for a pen. Then he freezes. At the bottom of the drawer lies a single photo. He gently pulls it out.

Her eyes sparkle with life, as she laughs at him over her shoulder, her blonde curls flying in the wind. He remembers the day they were married, how happy he'd been. He tries to shove other memories away but can't.

"I had to do it," she says. "I wasn't ready."

"You knew it wasn't safe." His words sound angry, accusatory. He tries to calm down. "You know why I didn't want you to do it. I didn't want you to get hurt."

She touches his cheek. "I'll be all right. It was my choice, my body. I'll be fine." As she adds the last part, her eyes plead with him to agree.

"Of course, you will," he says.

But she isn't. Infection has already set in, and her sparkling eyes grow dim and dark with pain. As she lies in her hospital bed, she clenches his hand tightly in hers. "Don't let me go. I'm not ready!" she cries.

But there's nothing he can do.

He lets out a shuddering breath. Dropping the photo back in place, he shuts the drawer firmly. He had failed to keep her safe. He can only hope that by doing legally now what was illegal then, he can protect those like her – give others the long, full lives that she was denied.

What about love? Is there someone out there who I could love with everything in me and who would love me back? If happily-ever-afters exist, would there be one for me? And since I'm not there, will he miss out on it? Will he wander through life, wondering why no one is right for him, never realizing how I longed to meet him?

She pulls into the parking lot. Her trembling has ceased, but a cold numbness has spread through her arms and legs. She climbs stiffly from the car and walks inside. The walls of the room are bare and white.

White. White means life, she thinks. *How is it that such a place can claim to bring life?*

The woman at the large desk glances up from her computer. "May I help you?"

"Yes, please," she says, not knowing if the words are true. She gives her name and takes the paperwork the lady hands her.

She sits on one of the cold, metal chairs lining the wall and tries to think clearly as she fills out the papers. Name? Easy enough. Age? She writes 19, three years older than she actually is. Address? She creates one.

She takes the papers back to the desk, and the woman leads her to a small room where she changes into a thin, paper gown and sits to wait.

How did I end up here? She had sought love and found anger and disdain. *White brings death. Love brings hate.* A line from a poem she recently read comes to mind. *"Here lies the body of this world, whose soul alas to hell is hurled."*

If the world's soul is hurled to hell, then where is mine?

What about all the people I might come across in daily life? Those I could change, even if just with a friendly smile or a laugh? A helping hand missing, a word of encouragement absent, a gift not given. Will the world be different because I'm not there?

He enters the room and glances around. His assistant has already gone through the prepping procedure and stands waiting in the corner. He smiles and greets the patient. She gives a nearly inaudible reply, and he pauses, looking at her. She's young, very young. He glances at her paperwork. *Nineteen.* Probably not her real age, but having that particular number come up again makes him wonder. For an instant, he thinks about the other that he lost along with his wife. *Nearly the same age . . .*

"Do your parents know you're here?" He wouldn't normally ask that, but her frightened eyes bother him.

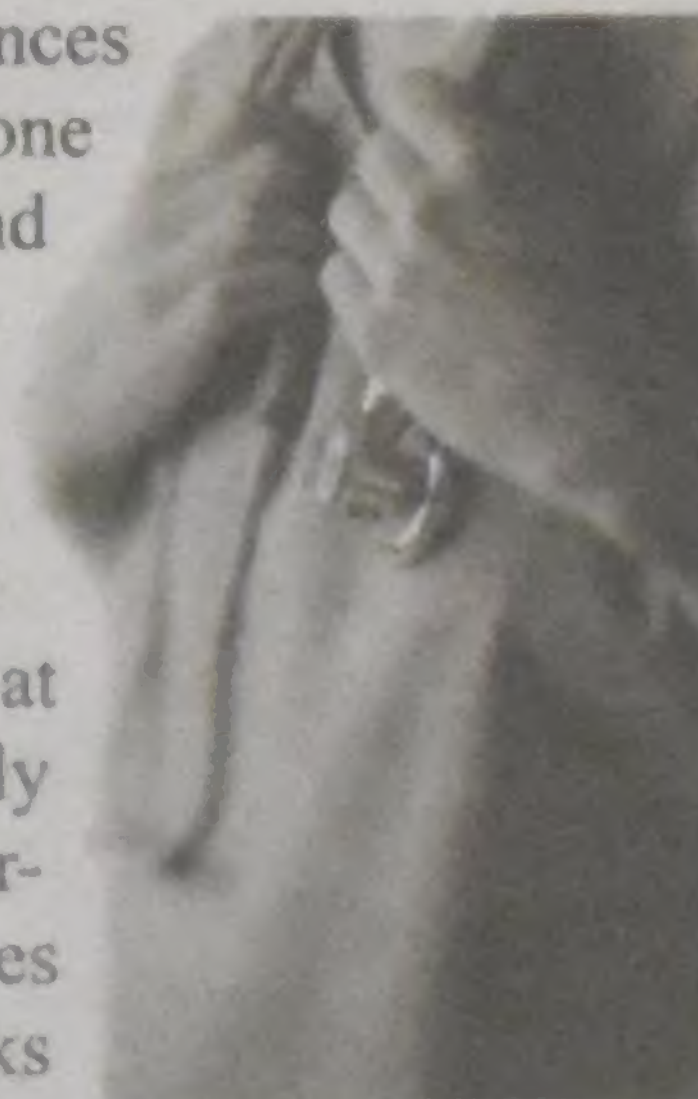
Her gaze drops to the floor. "My mom knows. My dad . . . if he knew. . . ." She shivers, rubbing her bare arms. That's when he sees the bruises. His gut clenches, and he mutters a curse. There's nothing he can do, of course – a recurring theme in his life.

Still, he leans forward. "No one can force you to do anything. You have the right to make this choice. No one can take that from you."

I want to stay longer. I want to breathe in cold, clear air, to count the stars on warm nights, and to pick out shapes in the clouds. I want to catch snowflakes on my tongue and wade in a cool, bubbling spring. I want to watch the bright morning sunrises and see the brilliantly colored sunsets. I want to experience everything good about life.

But it seems that choice has been taken from me.

My choice? It's the only choice. She stares at the doctor, knowing he doesn't understand. His eyes say he has



Features

Our second place winner is Sonya VanderVeen Feddema who will receive a subscription to *Christian Courier* for her story "Small-Big Boy." Sonya's story impresses with its spiritual maturity, deftly inserted without preachiness. Schuurman commented, "'Small-Big Boy' is sparsely written, but tenderly opens up questions of pain and forgiveness. The story's central metaphor is a subtle, yet moving image that catches the reader off-guard. Finally, unlike all the other finalists, it lacks the clear conclusion of a happy ending, which is something I appreciated." - Cathy Smith, Features Editor.

Small-big boy

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



Leaning on my walker, I stand on the sidewalk outside my sister Emma's house and look down the street at the budding maple trees. A woman walks toward me.

"Wilhelm, you're back,"

she says when she reaches me.

I smile. *I can't remember her name. She lives down the street. Last summer, she often sat on her front lawn beside her husband, both reading books, as I shuffled by hanging onto my walker, my damaged feet aching. Damaged when I was a small boy. But they've carried me far. How did I get so far on damaged feet?*

"Yes, I am," I reply. *Better to say too little than too much.*

"How are you doing?" she asks.

What does she mean by that question? Does she know what I did? I don't want her to find out what happened. Still, neighbours talk. Maybe Marcus from down the street told her. Out of concern, of course. Or . . . or did he say - him being a Christian and so sure of himself - "Fool! Doesn't he know that Jesus gives us hope for today and for eternity?" Is that what Marcus said about me? Did he put a knife to my back? No! No! No! Knives to the back and guns to the head - that was from before. During that other time when I was a small boy in the concentration camp. The woman is saying something to me.

"What did you say?" I ask.

"You were in the hospital," she says.

"Yes," I answer. "Long days. Months and months. Since last summer."

I hate the silence, the awkwardness that hospital-talk brings. She is looking at me with questioning eyes.

"I made a fool out of myself," I say.

She doesn't look surprised. Maybe she knows other old men who have made fools out of themselves. Really, I'd rather go for a walk like I had planned to. But she doesn't move. Should I tell her what hospital I was in, or does she already know? Should I say that I've had therapy? I can hardly say the word - "therapy." In the old country, no one went to a therapist. Did we even have them?

"A fool?" she asks.

A boy bikes past us up the street. He swerves wildly, then straightens out, just in time.

"I wasn't thinking straight," I say. *Will she understand?*

"Oh," she says, waiting.

Should I tell her? No, I won't. She might think, "How could he do that - a hard working, Mennonite church-goer?" I don't need more condemnation. I damn myself again and again. No one is better at condemning me than I am. No, I will not tell her.

I say, "We can lose our way."

"Yes," she says. "But there is grace."

She doesn't say more or explain what she means. Maybe she thinks an old church-goer like me knows all about grace.

"Lose our way," I continue. "People in the Bible did, too."

"Yes," she says.

I know that this woman knows the Bible. She goes to some other church. I don't know which one. Not Mennonite. Reformed, or something. But that's all right. Once, we had a little talk on the sidewalk and she said something about Jesus' resurrection and Easter. But when we talked then, she didn't know about the thoughts in my head. How I couldn't stop thinking about the knife. The knife and leaving. Leaving for good. Not sure if God would want me on the other side. Probably not. But, still, to leave this hell of memories. The war. The concentration camp. How the angry guard stomped on my bare feet with his heavy boot. But worst of all, Udo. No small boy should see his older brother raped, then shot. Would this woman speak of grace to me if she knew how I slammed the knife against

my chest? My arms suddenly weak. Blood, but not enough. I can tell she is restless. She wants to keep walking. Wait . . . what is she doing? Why is she stooping down and picking a flower from Emma's garden? A daffodil. Golden.

"Emma won't mind," she says.

I know she is right. Emma is friendly with all the neighbours. Emma is good to me, too. She is taking care of me till I can go home to my own house next to hers. Why is the woman stepping toward me? What's happening? She puts the daffodil stem in my jacket's buttonhole. This is not what I expect. This is not what old Mennonite men like me allow to happen. But it has.

"I have to go," she says. "Goodbye, Wilhelm."

She knows. I know that she knows because her eyes are wet, just barely.

I hang onto my walker and watch her quickly walk away. She disappears around the corner and is gone. At the house by the corner, the boy on the bike, the boy who almost fell earlier, now bikes too fast - wildly - onto the gravel driveway. The bike veers and hits the parked van. The boy and bike crash to the ground. The boy wails. There is his father, on the roof by the chimney. He glances down. Sees what happened. Rushes to the ladder that leans against the house. Step by step, fast, fast, he backs down the ladder and then he is on the ground, running to the boy.

I hold my breath. Will the father hit the boy because he has banged against the van?

The father stoops down and hugs the boy.

I let out my breath.

The boy is small, but he is too big, I think, for the father to pick up. But, wait . . . I am wrong.

The father picks up the small-big boy. The boy's head rests on his father's shoulder. The father seems to be speaking to the boy.

What is he saying to the boy? I am too far away to hear. I hope he tells his small-big boy, "I am here. I'll take care of you."

I walk past the daffodils back to the house.

I will ask Emma to make me some tea. And I will ask her for a small cup of water for the golden daffodil in my button hole.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@a hotmail com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



Last day ...continued from p.10

known pain, but he doesn't understand *her*. Doesn't know about her life, her parents, the one she had thought she loved. He doesn't understand the terror clutching her stomach, the thoughts flying through her mind, the numbness spreading through her body. He doesn't understand *that*. How could he?

"I've chosen," she says, trying to make her voice strong.

* * *

I wonder about the bigger things out there. Does anyone know about me - about my dreams? Does anyone care about what happens to me? Do I still have a purpose, even though I'll never taste the greatest things about life?

* * *

He nods. He didn't expect anything different. He wash-

es his hands at the sink and snaps on his surgical gloves.

"Are you ready to begin the procedure?"

* * *

It's almost here. It's almost time to leave. I'm not sure what this life of mine can accomplish, but I think there's something. For if life ever loses its value, death has truly won. I refuse to believe that will happen.

* * *

"I'm ready," she replies. *No. Say you want to leave, that you've changed your mind. She silences her thoughts. I've chosen. Everything will be fine. I'll be fine.*

This time she doesn't even try to make herself believe the words.

* * *

It's time. I know that. In a world of victims, I have become the last. Into my quiet rest enters a sudden pain. Darkness. Then a sense of something else . . . of Someone with me.

My life's end has come.

But I refuse to believe this will be the end of my story.

Ruth Anne Burrell is a professional writing major at Taylor University and has written for a variety of periodicals including *Christian Communicator*, *The Secret Place*, *Evangel* and others.



Features

This story by Josh Bingham, last year's second place winner, was another strong contender. It offers authentic details about vintage items and a plot that moves along briskly. Wityoet noted: "This is an easy read with lots of suspense and a surprise ending. What I really like about this story is the satisfying way the protagonist deals with his pang of conscience. It's a psychological drama that highlights honesty and avoids easy spiritualization, for example: using the money for a 'kingdom cause.' It encourages discussion: 'What would I have done in this circumstance?'" — *Cathy Smith, Features Editor*

The garage sale find

Josh Bingham

It was late in the year for a garage sale, but when John Rivers saw the listing in the paper, he had to go. Just days ago, he had considered canceling his subscription until March, when people started having sales again. He felt thankful that he hadn't. If so, he would have missed out on this one.

The ad promoted it as a moving sale. John had found great treasures at such sales. To take as little with them as possible, people often let things go for next to nothing, having never researched an item's worth. He had found a Milky the Moo Cow toy from the 1970s in its original box for 50 cents and resold it on eBay for over \$60. Other finds included a box-full of AWA Remco wrestling figures from the 1980s that he paid five bucks for and made \$40 off, and a near-mint, paperback first-edition of Stephen King's *The Colorado Kid* that he got for a dime and sold for \$35.

John knew his stuff. Buying and selling on the Internet was how he made his living, and a fine living it was. Items sold a little slower in the spring and summer, but enough money came in to meet his needs. The cold months served as his bread-winning period. For this reason, during garage sale season, he concentrated more on buying, listing less than half of his inventory online. His closet served as a storage room for items that he would sell throughout the winter, after taking most of autumn off for vacation.

Today was an exception, however. John spotted the balloons swaying from the mailbox and pulled up in front of a two-story home with an attached garage. With shutters and a roof that looked new, the house was very nice. Edged, lush-green, and cut to an attractive height, the yard formed a perfect square. A large elm tree, its leaves long-since raked, bagged, and hauled away to the compost, sat in the middle with a tire hanging from one branch. Several of the neighbours had pumpkins sitting on porches, ghosts dangling from railings, and cardboard cutouts of black cats and witches in windows. This property should have had signs reading "egg me" or "soap me" in the windows. The owner, or owners, definitely didn't get into the Hallowe'en spirit.

John got out and started up the freshly-blacktopped drive. Tables stacked with items lined both sides. The cool air made him wish he had donned a sweater instead of the t-shirt he'd opted for. He nodded at the elderly woman sitting in a lawn chair by the open garage door.

"Good morning," she said, drawing a shawl she had likely knitted herself about her frail frame.

"Hello," he said through a smile.

With nothing appearing picked over, it looked like he was the first customer. It didn't come as a surprise. It was Wednesday. Most folks had to work or go to school. The last thing on an ordinary person's mind was going to a garage sale.

Leaves skittered down the street as John scanned the tables. There were a lot of glasses, dishes, and other kitchen whatnots. Cookbooks fanned

out next to a stack of battered romance novels. Ceramic figurines of puppies and kittens formed a circle around a cookie jar that looked like a miniature barn. On the other side, stacks of clothes took up most of the space. John was beginning to feel like he had wasted his time when he saw a shoebox containing old baseball cards next to a rusty clothes iron.

Okay, here we go, he thought, picking up a card.

He guessed there were about 100 cards in all, and most appeared to be from the 1920s and '30s. Their shape, texture and condition proved them as originals. His trained eye could spot a reprint a mile away. How the lady had come across these treasures he could only venture to guess. She didn't appear old enough to have lived during that period.

There was no price on the box. He snatched it up and turned towards her, trying to keep a poker face.

"How much for the baseball cards?"

"Oh, I don't know," the woman said, making John's heart race. "I don't know anything about them. They were my dad's. I don't know ... \$10?"

"Okay," he said, with a little too much enthusiasm. Sometimes, it proved difficult to mask it. With how much these cards would bring, John could take all of next year off if he so desired.

He dug a crumpled 10 out of his pants pocket. As he unfolded it, he noticed a card in the box that, before, he had only seen in pictures. A chill went up his back.

No way, he thought. *No way!*

Way. John was looking down at an original T-109 card of Honus Wagner. The edges appeared crisp, with just some minuscule threads exposed. The background had some slight discoloration. He wasn't a professional grader, but from what he did know, he would have rated the card an eight out of ten. The same card in much-worse condition had fetched well over six figures, usually escalating past the half-million mark. The best one had gone for over a million dollars at auction a few years ago. This one looked far better.

It felt like John's hair was standing on end, and his breathing had quickened. He hoped he didn't suffer a heart attack right here. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. How could the woman *not* know what she had? Who hadn't heard the story behind this card? John knew

it inside and out. In the early 20th century, a tobacco company had decided to print pictures of professional baseball players and put them in packs of cigarettes. When Pirates star Honus Wagner found out, he ordered the company to stop including his card, citing that it encouraged kids to smoke. Of the card that would become known as the T-109 gem, only 200 were ever printed. Today, only 60 were thought to exist.

John swallowed hard and handed the money to the woman, his hands trembling. He noticed that the woman was also shaking and figured she had Parkinson's Disease. Hopefully she didn't think he was mocking her. To control his nerves right now seemed impossible.

"Thank you," she said.

He forced a smile. He didn't even



want to look inside the garage at whatever else she had. Taking the prize and running sounded best.

Moving down the driveway, he felt like a thief. Yeah, he had bought items before that he knew held a much higher value than what he'd paid, but this was like paying a quarter for the original U.S. Constitution.

He got in the car and put the box down carefully on the passenger's seat. When he shut the door, silence rang out. He stared at the Wagner card peeking out

from the avalanche of others. The old lady's voice seemed to speak in his mind: *They were my dad's.*

He looked up at her. She pulled the shawl tighter around her and shook. Her next residence would probably be a nursing home, soon followed by the graveyard. What could she do with the money from these cards? It would set him for life.

A cat pranced out of the garage and twined between the woman's legs. She reached down and petted it.

He started the car. She would never find out what she had practically given away. And, as he often reasoned, he hadn't taken an item for nothing. He had paid the asking price. Sure, the seller didn't know the actual value, but was that his fault?

He drove down the block and glanced in the rearview mirror at the empty curb. What if she didn't get another customer all day?

Stop thinking like that.

He'd never had so much concern for someone he'd bought something from before, but then he'd never gotten anything worth well over a million bucks, either. And most of the sellers had been well-off career women married to men who worked in offices and made important decisions. None of John's jobs had ever come with an office, and his responsibility always centered around doing what others told him to do. The pay certainly didn't look handsome, either. Trading the last job as a fast-food cook for a scavenging business hadn't involved too much thought or risk.

An image of the woman shaking as she'd taken his money floated in his mind. At the next street, he made a right and circled around, pulling up in front of her house again. She watched him as he got out and approached, the box in his hands.

On his way up the drive, he said, "I noticed these cards are worth more than what you sold them for."

He said it this way so it didn't sound like he had willfully swindled her, even though he had.

She waved a hand. "It's okay. I have too much stuff, anyway. I don't need it."

As John drew closer, the temptation to take it at that and leave arose, but he didn't give in. He had to tell her how much the cards were worth.

"I don't think you understand," he said, and doing something he'd never done before, told her how much the items were worth. With trembling fingers, he picked up the Honus Wagner card. "This one alone is worth over a million dollars."



Columns

The garage sale find...continued from p. 12

Her head bobbing, the old woman didn't appear phased. "I already sold them to you. What's done is done."

John couldn't believe his good fortune. The woman didn't want the cards back! Why did he still feel like a creep, then?

"Look, I don't want to take advantage of you. Why don't you put these back in the house and call your kids and tell them what I told you?"

"Kids? Oh, I don't have any children. I've never been married."

It was worse than John thought. The woman appeared to be not of a sound mind and totally alone. In addition to the signs she should have had to instruct Halloween enthusiasts to mess up her property, there should have been one reading ROB ME.

"I can't take these cards," John said, and put the box on her lap.

"No returns," the woman said, picking the box up and holding it out.

John eyed it for a long time. Well, he had tried. He grabbed it, got back in the car, and drove home. The suspicion that the cards were stolen came, but he pushed it aside. The woman hadn't seemed capable of any wrongdoing. More than likely, she just wasn't wrapped too tight. His own analysis ruled her incompetent and naive.

He had the Honus Wagner card professionally graded and it earned a rating of nine, the highest ever for the card. And as expected, it went for the highest amount ever for any sports card on Sothebys, with the auction ending with a bid of \$1.7 million. At the advice of a lawyer, John had chosen the higher-end auction website to sell the card. The others he sold on eBay for a total of \$423,132. When asked where he got them, John said they had belonged to a friend, who had given them to him as a birthday present years ago. When asked about the whereabouts of the friend, an imaginary person named Chuck Davis, John said he had moved to South Korea to serve as a missionary. He had given the cards as a declaration of poverty and to live a surrendered life to God.

As the weeks passed, guilt strengthened in John's heart. The woman had been stubborn and foolish. Didn't she deserve what had happened? He had tried to return the cards—really he had, but she wouldn't take them. What could he do about it?

The Monday before Thanksgiving, he drove over to the house where he had bought the cards and rang the doorbell. A young woman with a sweaty face and wearing a leotard opened the door. Exercise music played in the background.

"Yes?" she said, sounding out of breath.

"Yes, I was wondering if there is an elderly woman living here?"

A crease appeared between the woman's eyes like he'd said the strangest thing ever. He guessed it did sound odd.

"No. My husband and I just moved here about a week ago," she said.

"Oh, okay. Sorry I bothered you."

John started to turn away when the woman called him back.

"The realtor told us that we were buying it from an older woman. Is she family or something?"

"No," John said. "I just wanted to talk with her about something very important. Do you know where she lives now?"

"No, but my realtor might."

She gave John her realtor's name. He was familiar with her, having seen her office downtown. The suspicion in this woman's eyes made John wonder if she regretted giving the information or if she just wanted him gone, fearful that he was a home-invader who had come by to case the place. Regardless, John was glad to get the lead.

"Thank you," he said.

"You bet."

John explained everything to the realtor, an older lady herself, and she gave him the name and address of the nursing home where the woman he'd gotten the cards from was staying. He drove straight there.

"I'm here to see Wanda Byers," John told the desk clerk. "I'm a friend."

"Please sign the guestbook," the woman said, "and use the hand-sanitizer. Her room is number 112." She pointed to the right. "It's down this hall and her room is the last one on the left."

"Thank you," John said, placing his hands under the motion-sensor on the hand-sanitizing machine.

When he neared Wanda's room, he pulled the cheque for the full amount he'd made off the sale of her baseball cards out of his shirt pocket.

She sat up when he walked into the room. Her condition had worsened; she shook all over. She stared at him like she'd never seen him before in her life. She probably had forgotten all about him.

"Wanda," he said. It felt odd to call her by her first name, since he didn't know her well. "I'm John Rivers. I bought the baseball cards off of you at the garage sale."

This last statement sounded more like a question because it served as an attempt to jog her memory. It didn't work. She looked scared, seeing only a stranger.

"You probably don't remember me," John said. "I just want to leave this with you. It's what I owe you."

He walked over to the bed, her wide-eyed gaze never leaving him, and placed the cheque on the nightstand.

"It's the full amount," John said, "made to your order."

Wanda just stared at him.

"Well, I'll be leaving now." His voice trembled. "You take care."

John Rivers made some drastic changes in the days that followed. He got a job as a merchandiser at a retail store and had his cheques direct-deposited into a brand new account at a bank he'd never done business with before. He canceled his subscription to the newspaper and always drove right on by every garage sale. His closet got emptied, the contents donated to the Salvation Army, and replaced with clothes. But most surprisingly of all, he never touched his account with over \$2 million sitting in it. He left it open in case Wanda Byers ever decided to cash her cheque, having mailed her a letter instructing her to do so. He would send one out every week for the rest of his life.



Josh Bingham's work has appeared in several publications, including The Springfield Paper, Weird Times, Muse Magazine, and, of course, Christian Courier. He lives in Ohio and has been writing since he has been a teenager.

Artful Eye



George Lake Evensong

These late summer days
the sun is brittle in skies
of silvery haze.
The light plays
quietly on quartzite grays,
then dives
with sparkling displays
into water like a window
shattered.

But evening like
a waterfowl canoes
across the mirrored trees.
Over the deep blues
of the lake
the last silver arrows
speed in the wake
of the loon,
and then the day is gone.



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Joe Veltman is the pastor of Calvary Community Church in New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys photography, writing poetry and many other hobbies.

Columns

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



The cover stopped me dead in my tracks. The title *Wild* blazed all over the bestseller table with another 20 books strategically positioned to imprint the word in my mind. But it was the single boot on the cover

that propelled me toward the table. One boot, I thought to myself. Not two, but one. One gigantic boot with red laces claiming half of the cover! Leaning toward one of the books, I read the more subdued print of the subtitle – “From lost to found on the Pacific Crest Trail.” And being a novice hiker, I was irrevocably hooked.

Cheryl Strayed, the author of *Wild*, committed herself to hiking 100 days and covering 1,100 miles – alone – at the age of 26 when her life was in tatters and she had nothing left to lose.

Her much loved mother had died of cancer at the age of 45, seven weeks after her diagnosis. Cheryl was 22 at the time and took care of her mother during those difficult weeks. While her mother, a lapsed Catholic, never gave her any religious training, this did not stop Cheryl from trying to find God and beseech him to intervene. But

A solo hike: the road to redemption

it was not to be and her mother's death left her an orphan. Her biological father had not been in her life since she was six, and her stepfather quickly became involved with someone else. She had an older sister and a younger brother and tried to keep a sense of cohesion in the family, but failed.

Cheryl was married during this time but after her mother's death she became involved in various unhealthy relationships. Over time she found herself hanging out with a junkie and quickly became one herself. Her inability to stop this destructive behaviour and the failure of her marriage to the man she still loved made her realize how lost she was, and led her to the decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail in search of the person she used to be.

Her hike began at the Mojave Desert and ended after 94 days when she reached the Bridge of the Gods in Oregon.

Honest and unflinching

Cheryl's frankness with the reader is refreshing. Her emotions are raw, swift and

vivid. She does not mince words or put herself in the best possible light. She gives the reader the pure unadulterated truth and lets them decide and judge. While some readers may find her straightforwardness unsettling, I found her honesty gritty and appealing.

Cheryl experienced her first revelation about herself when she was young and in church. Her own family did not attend church but she was at a friend's house for a sleepover. The following morning they went to church. In Sunday school Cheryl was given a booklet of reproductions of water-

colours of butterflies, wild flowers and other natural wonders. On the opposite side of the pages were descriptions of the beautiful images. The words pierced her heart as she began to understand the power of the written word. She soon realized she wanted to harness this power in her life and write about this kind of beauty.

Wild is much more than a memoir about losing one's mother. It's primal in the deepest sense. Cheryl quickly realizes she is

horribly unprepared for this arduous journey and is basically at the mercy of nature. Her backpack, called Monster, is much too heavy and her hiking boots are far too small. She worries about having enough water and food as well as having enough strength to take the next step. At night, she adopts the mantra “I am not afraid,” when she lies alone in the darkness of her small tent and unfamiliar noises threaten her sanity. Most often at the end of the day she has little energy to deal with the emotional pain of losing her mother and her husband. And yet, she forges forward.

Cheryl is an elegant and evocative writer. Her story is about an incredible inward and outward journey from despair to a renewed sense of herself while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. Her story is also one of innate human weaknesses and the untapped reserves of strength we all possess. It is an amazing journey on many levels and is one of the most honest and unflinching stories I have read in a long time.

And the single boot on the cover? Read the prologue of the book. ➤

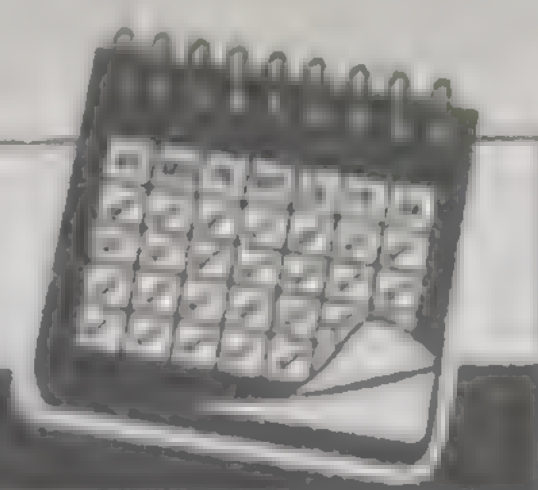
Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.



Cheryl Strayed

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



This happens to me all the time. I decide on a topic. I mull it over. I scan my quotation file for that half-remembered gem teasing the edge of my consciousness. Then I get on my blogroll and read a post by someone who's written on the same theme and arrived at the same conclusion. To top it off, the piece is so well vinted, sparkling with poetic juice, that it seems rather pointless for me to even attempt my version. If you type “Christian blogs” into Google's search engine, you'll get 566,000,000 hits. Ann Voskamp, of *One Thousand Gifts* fame, has been blogging since 2003. James Schaap's blog, *Stuff in the Basement*, has been the home of his wit and wisdom since 2007. That's a lot of words! And those are only two of the bloggers I read regularly. Some days I wonder if there are more writers than readers!

So why would I bother, when I can go from light bulb over my head to crestfallen chops hanging over my keyboard in the time it takes to click a link? How foolish and narcissistic to believe that I can create anything original of spiritual or literary value. Whenever I get thinking that way, though, I've got Daniel Meeter and Amy Adair in my back pocket. Thank the Lord for them.

Why write?

I've never met Daniel Meeter. Quite sure he doesn't know me, either. In January 1988, *The Reformed Journal* published his article “Bowing before the Text.” A pastor, he describes his weekly wrestling match with biblical infallibility. He writes about the discipline required to bow before the text, to choose to submit to the holiness of the Word over and over again, as he prepares sermons. He bemoans the insufficiency of inerrancy doctrines and the deficits of kingdom-historical approaches and the unending compulsions and temptations to subjectivize the text. He concludes, “No interpretation of Scripture ever does it justice. No one is ever obedient enough to the text.” Every Sunday, he says, he preaches the gospel only as an act of faith in the person of God; “another moment in my life-long conversion of my old self to the new.”

That assertion, “No interpretation of Scripture ever does it justice. No one is ever obedient enough to the text,” freed me as profoundly as the angel freed jailed Peter, striking him on the side with a good-old-boy punch. By 1988, I'd been expending critical energy for more than a decade, trying to comprehend what the Bible was saying about women, or more precisely, about me. Was I created in God's image? Or Adam's? Was I of equal worth as a man in God's estimation? What about in the church? I'd read tomes on what the

Bible has to say about women and their role in marriage, the church and society. If only I could reconcile all the conflicting exegeses! Meeter's insight crystallized a moment of liberation. I couldn't! No one's interpretation of Scripture ever does it justice! It wasn't about my ability to be obedient to the text. It was about the text's ability to usher forth my Lord and Saviour, the Person, the one who was obedient for me.

Thanks to Daniel Meeter's words, my chains fell off.

Stepping out in faith

Amy Adair writes for thinkchristian.net. I've never met her. Pretty sure she doesn't know me. When I was considering whether to take on the position of features editor for *Christian Courier*, stymied in my decision-making by my own insecurities, I recalled one of Amy's posts about taking on challenges. She and her husband had adopted a little girl from China with significant developmental disabilities. She summed up: “It hasn't always been easy, but stepping out of my comfort zone has allowed me to experience a new joy. I'm no longer going through the motions of my faith, but I get to experience and see God in a deep and profound way. I don't want to think about what I would have missed if I had simply said, ‘I don't want to do this. Adoption is too hard.’” Then she asked:

THE REFORMED JOURNAL

Daniel Meeter
BOWING BEFORE THE TEXT

Robert Larrar Capon
HOW TO DESTROY A PARABLE

The Southern Baptist contention
What's in a baptism?
Pulpit language • Contemplating death
Review: David Buttrick, Walter Wangerin, Jr.

“Are you listening to God? Is he asking you to do something? What would happen if you simply trusted him and stepped out in faith?” Amy's questions kept resurfacing. Risk reframed as God's invitation to step out in faith. Done. Here I am at CC.

Daniel and Amy don't know how much they impacted me. Perhaps they, too, have wondered whether writing was a waste of their time. I bet if I read all of Voskamp's or Schaap's blog posts, or perused even a fraction of the 566,000,000 Google hits, I'd find posts that echoed those of Daniel or Amy, that expressed similar points of view, perhaps phrased even more eloquent-

See *Why write* p. 16

Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema



From 1929 to 1933 Republican Herbert Hoover, the Depression President, insisted on balanced budgets and forcefully suppressed demonstrators. And this while 28 percent of Americans had no income whatsoever. Hoover was replaced by a Democrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who pulled America back from the brink by flooding the nation with make-work projects through deficit financing, which remained so popular and caused so much debt that now more of the same will simply spell "death-knell."

Debts are like sins. Isaiah (1:18) calls them scarlet. In financial reports debts are coloured red – scarlet. I raise the RED ALERT warning because complacency has conquered common sense. Superficially all looks well. Teenagers chat on their cell phones and text as if their lives depend on it, clueless that their world is drowning in debt.

Here's what happened. When I came to Canada in 1951 most women didn't work. Soon, however, we were sold on bigger suburban dwellings, which called for a second car that was paid for by putting the spouse to work. When that was not enough to make ends meet, Middle Americans started using their homes as cash machines. The crash meant that there's now nowhere to go but down: only the year of Jubilee – when all debts are forgiven – will extract us from our self-induced predicament, coinciding with Jesus' return.

We are in the midst of a slow-motion demolition of society: failure in politics, failure in the environment, failure in public health, and failure in education, all the direct result of the world-wide worship of Mammon. Politics has become a question of money; the environment is a slave to economic growth; fast food diets and lazy living are causing an epidemic of obesity and diabetes; schools at all levels prepare students for an outdated future where "peak everything" rules.

The root of all evil

I see the number 666 as depicting money – the root of all evil – with everything expressed in certain digits: credit cards, debit cards, PIN and social insurance numbers, trillions of debts in euros or dollars. My study bible suggests that each digit of 666 falls short of the perfect number seven, which suggests to me that every remedy involving money – 666 – will fail. The current Euro crisis is a prime example.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's use of deficit spending to help America through the Great Depression has become the template for how to deal with difficult economic times.

RED ALERT: Become a mole for Jesus!

Money is so totally intertwined in our lives that disentangling is impossible. We are caught up in such an unprecedentedly dangerous situation that, I think, it's time to heed Revelation 18:4: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues."

We need a new way of life, away from the causes of climate change, away from our forced slavery to factory foods, away from chemicals to enhance produce appearance, from stabilizers that fake freshness, all causing obesity, cancers and heart attacks.

Yet it's impossible to opt out: there's no escape, but that doesn't mean that we are helpless. We can become moles for Jesus.

Being moles

In spy terms, moles seemingly work for one boss but, in secret, report to another. The bible is full of such people. Take Obadiah. In 1 Kings 18, while Jezebel, the wicked queen, was out to kill the prophets, Obadiah was the mole right under her nose, stealthily keeping 100 prophets alive. No mean feat in times of extreme famine. These people, together with the 7,000 then and the saints today who refuse to worship idols, keep adhering to the covenant of the Lord. Nicodemus is another such character. We owe to Nicodemus that Jesus left us with John 3:16 telling us that God's love for the cosmos trumps any other expression of love.

Become a mole for Jesus. In our lives we must always act with Jesus' love for creation in mind: how we eat, where we drive, what we do. My wife and I have given up television, the very instrument whose sole purpose is to promote 666. Not only do we save \$65 monthly, but we now listen more to radio, music, read more, and talk and walk more. We are trying to adopt a completely different mindset, while praying for forgiveness when we have no other choice.

RED ALERT. I believe that there is a more than even chance that the world's financial system will collapse, perhaps as early as this fall. Like a pile of sand that has reached its maximum height, the addition of one more ill-timed bank failure, natural catastrophe, or terrorist attack could cause our financial foolishness to collapse in an uncontrolled cascade. We are in uncharted waters. We live in a world that is but one errant keystroke away from serious calamity. That may mean no access to ATMs or credit or debit cards, making it prudent to keep a \$1,000 in small bills handy just in case.

Bert Hielema (hielemat@allstream.net) lives in Tweed, Ont. He keeps a blog: <http://hielemat.ca/blog/>.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



Kenny Warkentin

We loved watching the Olympics. Sometimes I think maybe we should just all take our vacation time to cheer on our Olympians. I know for myself that I can easily get caught up in all the events.

This year Rick Hansen had a special segment that focused on stories of Olympians and those who have inspired them to be all they can be. During one of those segments one of the Olympians shared his journey toward the Olympics and made a specific statement that struck home for me. He said that greatness doesn't happen without a struggle.

I thought about that for a while and realized that this is such a key foundational reality that sometimes we forget about.

In scripture, we know words like perseverance, battle, discipline, race and many more which connote that our life as Jesus followers is not just as easy as praying the salvation prayer, but that it also means we enter into a lifelong journey of restoration.

I know that my struggle with same gender attraction is something that has given me much understanding of those words. When you have to deny feelings and the world around you says to just accept

who you are, at times things don't make sense. But when you factor in a faith relationship with Jesus it takes on a whole new reality. His strength is made perfect in my weakness.

This isn't just in terms of those who struggle with same gender attraction but rather this is a truth for all of us. Each one of us has feelings, thoughts and/or actions that may go contrary to how we should live and play a part in the decisions that we make.

The reality for most of us is that we'd really appreciate life way more if it was easier, and that we wouldn't have to struggle with unwanted feelings or thoughts or actions. Couldn't someone or something make us feel better? We could take matters into our own hands and make ourselves feel better for the moment, and we do that pretty well. I think if we sat still and looked closely at our lives and how we meet our own temporary happiness, we'd find that shopping, work, relationships, eating and vacations may look a whole lot different to us. I'm not saying that any of these things is bad, we all need time away to rest and we need food, work and relationships for positive health, but what happens when we use those things to make our lives temporarily easy? When we use all of those things to hide our struggles rather than dealing with them in positive ways?

When I think of the Olympian and what

The faithful Olympian

he shared, I think to myself, "How do I face my struggle? Do I wrestle with it? Do I exercise self control and discipline in order to walk in great health, ready to win the race?" I have to admit that I'd sometimes really like the journey to be easier. Couldn't someone make it easier? Why does it have to be so difficult sometimes? I look at the Olympians and their strength, and I imagine all the hard work to get to the place they are at. They've had to watch what they eat, how much sleep they get, how much exercise and training they put in. They will have had to go to events to fine tune their sport and challenge themselves to do better. They will have had to deny themselves things so that they can be the best they can be. They will also have relied on coaches and trainers who see them as valuable and talented.



"Well done my good and faithful Olympian."

In our faith in Jesus, we are challenged to put off our old self and put on the new selves. We need to be people who are disciplined and watching what we do in all areas of our lives, so that we can be the men and women we are called to be. God doesn't want us to be a certain way because he is a dictator or a really bad coach, but rather because he sees in us something that we don't. He loves us so incredibly much that he sees value and worth and that we can actually do life way better when we admit our weakness. He wants this so that he can be our strength and enable us to face all that life has to throw at us. It is in this reality that I try to live my life. Sometimes I feel like that Olympian who is disciplined and ready to face an opponent, and sometimes, when I don't, I recognize that I can trust God to be my strength and that he really is encouraging me to be the best I can be and maybe even placing that gold medal around my neck, all the while saying "well done my good and faithful Olympian."

Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

Columns

From the 11th
Province

Marian Van Til



I've been writing a series here on the five-points of Calvinism. This month I am detouring; I will return to my series in September.

I've had Crohn's disease for 30-plus years. Almost four years ago, in answer to much prayer the Lord led me to two new things: a very effective diet and an efficacious yet benign generic drug. I experienced great healing. But right now I'm contending with a full-blown setback. A flare.

I've figured out what caused the flare. Even better: my husband, extended family, friends, church community are bringing my case forward to God's throne of grace. Better yet: I, diseased-and-fallen-but-redeemed creature of God, have a Mediator, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who himself is pleading for me in heaven.

God is granting me healing again. He has chosen the "bit by bit" method. I think I know why. I'm a *let's get 'er done* kind of person. I can be impatient. I tend to want my kind of results, when I want them. That can create a sense of overblown self-sufficiency. But that spirit is antithetical to utter reliance on our heavenly Father for our "daily bread." So God reigns me in, requires forbearance. I've had to undergo it many times. I can be a slow learner!

How great a Comforter

Despite the flare, God allowed me to play for my Sunday service as usual the last two weeks. And he lavished unexpected blessings. The Scripture lessons were from the lectionary, it being a Lutheran church; thus they had been chosen long ago by others. And I myself had chosen the music before I became ill. But how wonderfully the Spirit works, and in exactly the measure we need! That first week, through lessons and hymns, I was assured and reassured of God's merciful care, his love, his ordaining of events and wise control of me and all he created.

A 17th century German Lutheran chorale opened the service: "Whatever God Ordains is Right." *Whatever God ordains is right?* Yes. Emphatically, yes (as difficult as it can be to "reasonably" explain). We sang:

*Whatever God ordains is right; his will is just and holy.
He holds us in his perfect might; in him our lives are godly.
He is our God and all we need.
The Father who preserves us still; to him we bend each heart and will.*

Why write...continued from p. 14

ly. But, in God's synchronicity, it was their words that found me and were salve to my soul.

Nancy Van Wyk Phillips, in a 1991 *Perspectives* article entitled "Divine Providence: Meaning in the Details," discusses the depth of Calvin's conception of providence and how it harmonizes, astonishingly, with the uncertainty principle of modern physics. Just as "it is impossible to predict events accurately at the molecular level, because the very act of observing the initial situation causes changes in the outcome," so there is a mystery in God's watching his world, mystery in his will and power as he sustains it and provides blessings new each morning. "We might say with Calvin," she writes, "that God's will animates the world and all its events, and that meaningfulness is to be found in the smallest details of our

*Whatever God ordains is right, and he will not deceive us.
He leads us in the way of light and will not ever leave us.
In him we rest, who makes the best of all the stumbling turns we take
And loves us for his mercy's sake.*

*Whatever God ordains is right; all that he does is for us.
He heals our souls and gives us sight and puts no ill before us.
Our God is true; he makes us new; or lives are built upon his rock,
Our cornerstone and building block.*

*Whatever God ordains is right; he guides our joy and sadness.
He is our life and blessed light; in him alone is gladness.
We see his face, the way of grace; he holds us in his mighty arm
And keeps us safe from ev'ry harm.*

No evil makes me fear

The Psalm of the day "happened" to be Psalm 23. We usually chant the Psalms but "something" had prompted me to have us sing a metrical version from the *Psalter Hymnal*. So this is what we – what I – confessed on that Sunday when I particularly needed the Saviour's healing touch.

*The Lord, my shepherd, rules my life and gives me all I need;
He leads me by refreshing streams; in pastures green I feed.*

*The Lord revives my failing strength, he makes my joy complete;
And in right paths, for his Name's sake, he guides my faltering feet.*

*Though in a valley dark as death, no evil makes me fear;
Your Shepherd's staff protects my way, for you are with me there.*

While all my enemies look on, you spread a royal

lives." I thank the Lord for Nancy. Her words undergird my faith. And, yes, I still have that magazine, too.

What about you? This is not just about writers. Why do anything? Because God is using the details of our lives in ways we don't know. Trust. Cast your bread upon the waters. Are you a good cook? Pass the biscuits! Have the gift of gab? Engage everyone you know with a smile and draw them in with your warmth. Paint? Fling your pigments like Jackson Pollock or sculpt your canvas like Van Gogh. Give yourself away, like Daniel Meeter or Amy Adair, so God can help someone like Cathy Smith. Serendipity in a Calvinist mold.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

feast;

You fill my cup, anoint my head, and treat me as your guest.

*Your goodness and your gracious love pursue me all my days;
Your house, O Lord, shall be my home – your name, my endless praise.*

The three remaining hymns were likewise comforting and joy-inducing, but one especially so: *I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest. Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast." I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad; I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.*

The third stanza confesses: *I heard the voice of Jesus say, "I am this dark world's light; look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright." I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun; and in that light of life I'll walk till trav'ling days are done.*



John Donne

My column title comes from a poem by John Donne (1572-1631), who was – or assumed he was – about to meet God because of his serious illness. While Crohn's can kill people, the end of my "trav'ling days" does not appear in sight. But as Donne knew, living life as if we are about to meet God is the wisest way to travel.

Marian Van Til is a former CC editor who lives in Youngstown, NY. She invites you to email her at mvantil@roadrunner.com and follow her blog at ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com.

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Ecclesiastes 12:13b

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1962 - September 8 - 2012

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in our lives, we along with our children and
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Obituaries

**Gerda Johanna Heinen**

January 6, 1919 - August 8, 2012

Gerda Heinen passed away peacefully, knowing she is embraced by God in heaven. We are grateful for her life and the love she so generously gave to her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and her community. Mom and oma was loved dearly. We are thankful and privileged to hold her memory in our hearts and model her example in our lives.

Gerda was predeceased by her husband Derk Jan Heinen in 1987, and her son Gerrit in 1947.

She will be missed by her children:

Henry and Greta Heinen, Langley, BC
Vicky and Henk Van Andel, Edmonton, AB
Arlene and Henk Van Hove, Langley, BC
Joyce and Joe Wierda, Surrey, BC
Dick and Bonnie Heinen, St. Albert, AB
Jann Rose Heinen, Surrey, BC
Marjolein and Jim Vriend, Abbotsford, BC
Annemarie and Case Van Muyen, Langley, BC
Marianne and Harry Kits, North Gower, ON
Martin and Marilyn Heinen, Surrey, BC
Wendy and Jan Vleeming, Surrey, BC
51 grandchildren and 87 great-grandchildren.

Correspondence address: Henry Heinen
20373 93 Avenue
Langley BC V1M 2L9

Suddenly on Wednesday, July 25th, 2012,
surrounded by his family, the Lord called home
our much loved husband and father

Johannes Jan (Hans) Van Manen

He was 68 years old.

Deeply missed by his wife Sadie and his children
David and Jane Van Manen - Cottam
Rick Van Manen - Edmonton
Sara and Mike Flokstra - Waterdown
Rob and Terra Van Manen - St. Catharines

Brother of

Wilma and Teade DeVries - Franeker, Friesland
George Vink - Peterborough
Ina and Otto Jeeninga - Heerlen, Limberg
Peter Van Manen - Oshawa
Mary and Lammert Huizenga - Brampton
John and Theresa Van Manen - Oshawa
Ted Van Manen - Brampton

Fondly remembered by his many nieces and
nephews.

Predeceased by his parents, Teunis and Tietje
Van Manen, and his sister, Evelyn Vink.

Please mail any correspondence to:

744 Glengrove St.,
Oshawa ON L1J 5C4

In memory of Hans, if so desired, memorial
donations may be made to Christian Reformed
World Missions.

*Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him,
my Saviour and my God. Ps. 42*

Opeinde, Netherlands

February 12, 1917

Loretto, Ontario

July 13, 2012

Ephesians 2

On Friday, July 13, 2012, the Lord took home
our much loved father, grandfather, great-grand-
father and great-great-grandfather

Willem (Bill) Braam

Widower of Aske Braam (Haan) since April 2011.
Predeceased by his daughter Hilda (1996), one
brother and two sisters. He will be greatly missed
and will be remembered with love by his children
and their families:

Hilda† Jim & Jane vanderVoort - Orillia, ON
Margaret & Steve Klingenberg
John and Rebecca Klingenberg
Charlot, Marcus
Angela, Luke, Samantha
James & Christine vanderVoort
Heather, Holly, Caroline, Jay, Sophia
Angela & Siebren Boersma
Steven, Samuel, Isaac, Esther
Hayley vanderVoort

Harold & Grace Braam - Mannheim, ON

Douglas & Suzanne Braam
Noah, Elijah, Carina, Silas
Ken & Diane Braam
Terah, Amanda, Cate
Sheila Braam & Adrian Jones
Ezra

Dick & Betsy Braam - Georgetown, ON

Jason & Retisny Braam
Evan, Emilia
Sarah & Joshua de Boer
Isaac, Aaron
Ryan & Hannah Braam
Zachary, Janae, Daniel

Mary & Gerry Bontius - Loretto, ON

Ken Bontius & Erin Keleher
Kevin & Claudia Bontius
Steve & Janice Bontius
Adrian, Jacob, Tyler
Suzanne & Rob Takacs
Mark & Michelle Bontius
Alyssa

"Saved by Grace!"

Memorial service led by Rev. H. Praamsma,
was held on Tuesday, July 17, 2012 at Holland
Christian Homes, Brampton.

Bartha Maria (Barthie) Knoppers-Boon

age 94, went to be with her Lord on August 15, 2012 in
Edmonton, Alberta.

Barthie was preceded in death by her husband of 64 years,
Rev. Nicolaas Bastiaan (Nick) Knoppers.

She was a courageous woman, coping with World War II oc-
cupation in Holland, immigration to Canada, parenting 6 chil-
dren, being the spouse of a busy minister, advocating equal
rights for women in all spheres of life, and giving generously
of her talents to many voluntary activities.

She will be very much missed by her children and
children-in-law:

Jake and Jocelyne (Montreal)
Annelies (Netherlands)
Bastian and Joan (Chicago)
Bartha and Daniel (Montreal)
Nick and Joanne (Edmonton)
Gary and Laura (State College, PA)

9 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren (with another
expected any day).

Memorial contributions may be made to the
Knoppers-Boon Scholarship Fund at The King's University
College, Edmonton, Canada (www.kingsu.ca).

Events

Blyth CRC

hopes to celebrate their
50th anniversary
September 15 & 16, 2012.

There will be a **breakfast**
on Saturday 8-11 a.m.
and an **Open House** 2-4 p.m.
A **special service** will be held
Sunday at 10 a.m.
Everyone is invited to come
and celebrate with us.



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EVERY Neighbor
EVERY Neighbor
a *River Park*
Disciple

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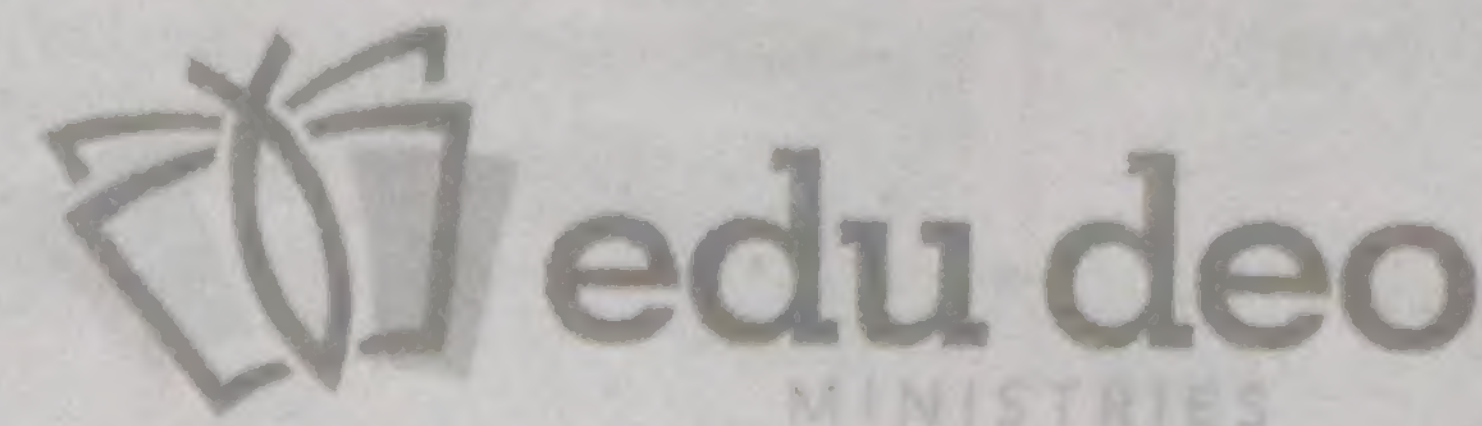
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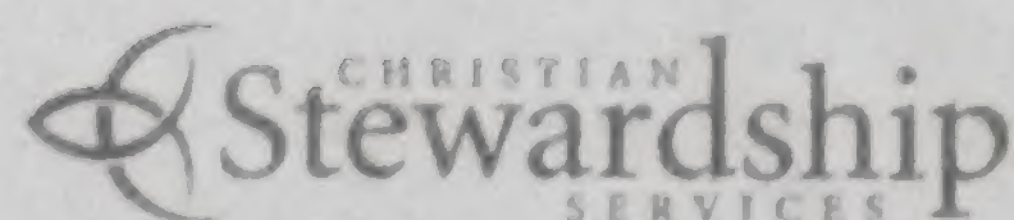


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The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing

Wednesday Aug. 29 at 1:30 p.m.

will be held, the Lord willing, at Westmount Christian Reformed Church, 405
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Everyone is welcome!

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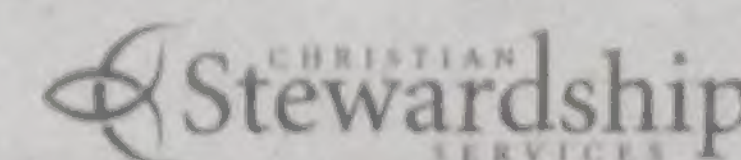
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Aug 29** The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing will be held, the Lord willing, at Westmount Christian Reformed Church, **Strathroy**, ON. 1:30 p.m. If you wish to have additional information contact Marianne Kingma - jmkingma7@gmail.com or 519-245-0139
- Sep 9** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Peter Breedveld will be preaching. DVDs are available.
- Sep 15,16** Blyth CRC 50th anniversary. See ad for details.
- Sep 18** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Musica Sacra Chorus". **Ancaster**, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 19** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Grimsby**, Mountain-view Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm. See hollandchristianmalechoir.com
- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.
- Sep 22** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. Durham Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 24** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. First Christian Reformed Church, **Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 26** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. Calvin Christian Reformed Church, **Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 27** "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. Cephas Christian Reformed Church, **Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 30** River Park CRC, **Calgary**, Alberta, formerly known as First CRC, will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness at a special service at 10:00 am.. 3818-14A St. SW.
- Oct 21** Lucknow Community Christian Reformed Church of **Lucknow**, Ont., Canada will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness with a Celebration Worship Service at 10:00 am. Everyone is welcome.
- Nov 2** Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad for more details.

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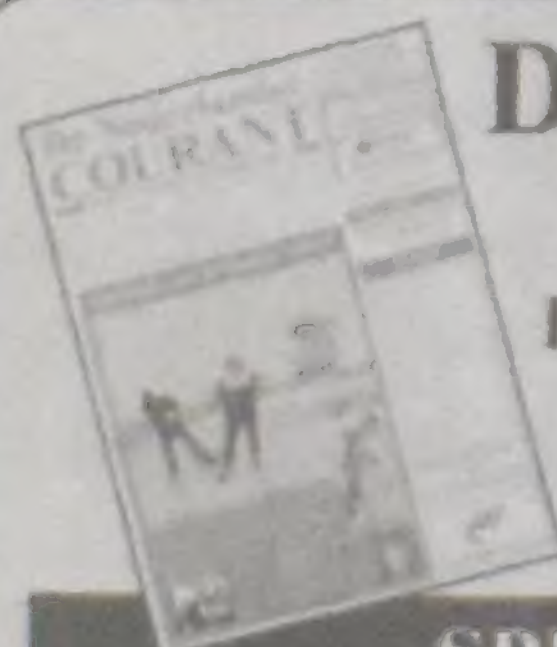
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News

Are you heading off to university soon and wondering what it means to be a Christian student in a highly secular environment? Maybe you know someone in this position? In the article that follows, Mike Wagenman, the Christian Reformed Campus Chaplain and Director of The Kuyper Centre at Western University, offers some lighthearted but valuable advice about how to be a Christian on campus.

Being Christian on campus: a top 10 list

10. Don't be a loner

Don't try to do this "Christian on campus" thing yourself. Not only are humans ill-equipped to live alone, the pressures to compromise are too strong to be resisted in isolation.

So, gather around yourself some like-minded Christ-followers. Make some Christian friends with whom you share a common outlook on life, faith and cultural engagement. Intentionally pursue relationships with people who will not only encourage you but tell you the hard truth when you start to go down the wrong path. Formally or informally, make community happen.



9. Adopt a body

It's too easy to become near-sighted while a student on campus. You live and breathe, eat and sleep with people who are in a similar life stage as you. It's too easy to become myopic and think that your world is all there is.

So, find a church community off campus where you can rub shoulders with senior citizens and drooling infants. A place where your hopes and concerns can be caught up into a larger vision of life in all its fullness. Be a part of a body.



8. Stretch yourself

During the university years, your mind, body, outlook on life and vision of the future will all grow. It makes sense – you're using those muscles on a daily basis. But, there are other parts of what it means to be human and to be a Christian – like worship, prayer, Bible study – that if you don't exercise them, they'll atrophy.

So, find a mentor, an older brother or sister in the faith who will challenge you to grow in all aspects of your discipleship and not always confirm your opinions. Find someone who is a few steps further along in the journey than you. Commit yourself

to well-rounded, stretching growth.



7. Practice a generous orthodoxy

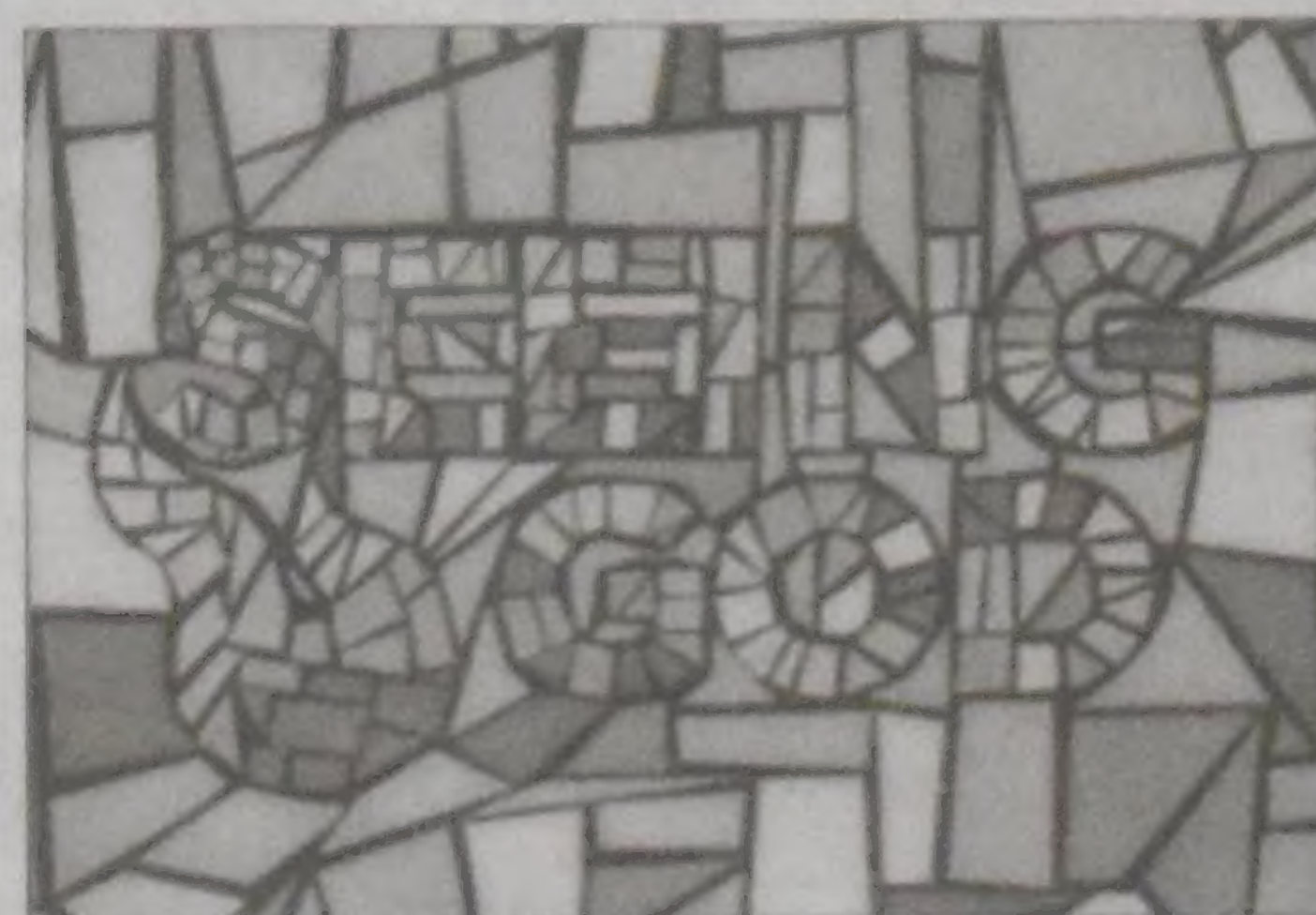
The history of the Apostles and their followers is all too full of division. The Orthodox vs. the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics vs. the Protestant Reformers. The Calvinists vs. the Arminians. The Tongues-Speakers vs. the non-tongues-speakers. The Creationists vs. the Intelligent Designers vs. everybody else. Etc.



Instead, embrace the whole height, breadth, and depth of the Christian church today. Of course, you believe what you believe, but practice unity and humility, too. Be generous like Jesus. Embrace folks from all streams of Christianity.

6. Be a whole person

We all know those people who have chopped themselves and their lives up into little bits. They show you whatever part is most advantageous in any given situation. They sing in the praise team on Sunday morning but God only knows what's going on with them Wednesday night.



Instead, don't compartmentalize your life. And on campus, don't reserve your "spiritual life" for such things as worship and Bible study outside the classroom and your "regular life" for inside the classroom or lab. There's no such division. Be a whole person and see God and faith in everything.

5. Love God with your mind

Part of what it means to love, follow and serve Jesus is to be a person committed to reality. As a student, your primary calling from God at this point in your life is to be a student. So, be a good student. Love ideas. Go after the truth within your coursework like a Rottweiler on a pork chop.



4. Buck the system

There is much good in the world, thanks to our Creator. But, since all things have been twisted, nothing can be taken in uncritically. So, practice cultural discernment – think critically about the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the lifestyle you follow. Analyze everything through a biblically-informed interpretive grid. Deconstruct everything. Be a critical participant.



3. Be the blessing

We live in a hurting world, no doubt. There are the global poor, those forced into prostitution, those caught in the stranglehold of addiction, the persecuted, those dying of despair, those enslaved to upward mobility – and that's only the human part of the world, only a fraction of all of Creation.

So, while you're at college or university, learn to share with others out of the abundance in your life. Volunteer at the soup kitchen downtown, go to Central America and build a school, do a counter-cultural thing like give your money away to an agency that will treat preventable



diseases on another continent. God blessed Abraham in Genesis 12 not so that he could be comfortable. God blessed Abraham in order that through Abraham, God's blessing might reach others. Be the blessing – and start with right here ... right now!

2. Become an activist

This is the Gospel truth: Christ cares about all of life. In fact, there is not one square inch of Creation about which Jesus Christ does not say, "This is Mine!" Which is to say that Jesus cares for more than you and your little soul. God loves the whole world – institutions, systems, structures, and all.

So, become an activist for Christ who will go out into a part of the world, who will take up a cause for redemptive good like social justice or extreme poverty or reform of the correctional system or Creation itself, the environment, and make it your life's passion. Invest in the future by living for something bigger than yourself, something that will outlive your lifetime.



1. Dig deep and dream big!

Dig down into the riches of Creation, the life of the university included. Dig deep into your subject matter and the historical development of your discipline. In so digging, you dig down into Christ who created all things and in whom all things hold together.



But also keep your eyes looking up – to the place where dreams originate. Dream a God-dream for the entire world. Dream of what a redeemed world will look like. And then roll up your sleeves and get to work making it reality in your city!

Mike Wagenman is the Director of The Kuyper Centre for Emerging Scholars (kuypercentre.ca) at Western University.

